COD STRIKES BACK HOW ESPORTS ARE CHANGING THE GAME



www.gamestm.co.uk

Xbox One | PS4 | Wii U | PS3 | Xbox 360 | PC | Virtual Reality | Mobile | PS Vita | 3DS | Retro

PS4 PRO THE LAST GEN

WHY SONY'S NEW MACHINE ENDS THE CONSOLE CYCLE AS WE KNOW IT

△ **DEVELOPER** VERDICT ON 4K AND HDR

○ IS THIS THE REAL **VR** MACHINE?

□ WHAT YOU NEED FOR THE **PERFECT** SETUP

✕ THE **GAMES** ENHANCED BY PS4 PRO

\+ DOES **MICROSOFT** HAVE AN ANSWER TO THE CHALLENGE?

POKÉMON SUN & MOON
Time for Go trainers to level up

INSIDE MAFIA III
We tour New Orleans with the dev team



THE RETURN OF PREY
The most exciting FPS in years is here

GAMING & GAMBLING
Can this growing problem be solved?

If there was one element of the PS4 Pro announcement that surprised me above all others it was not the colour contrast of HDR, the impressive upscaling of games to 4K or our first look at *Mass Effect Andromeda* gameplay (as excited as I was). It was the lack of an ultra high-definition Blu-ray player.

Now, I don't own any UHD Blu-rays and I had no plans to buy any. I'm perfectly happy streaming movies through Netflix and other subscription services these days, but the surprise I felt wasn't about what I wanted from the console; it was about what I expected from a Sony gaming machine with its great legacy of using the PlayStation as a Trojan horse for new media formats.

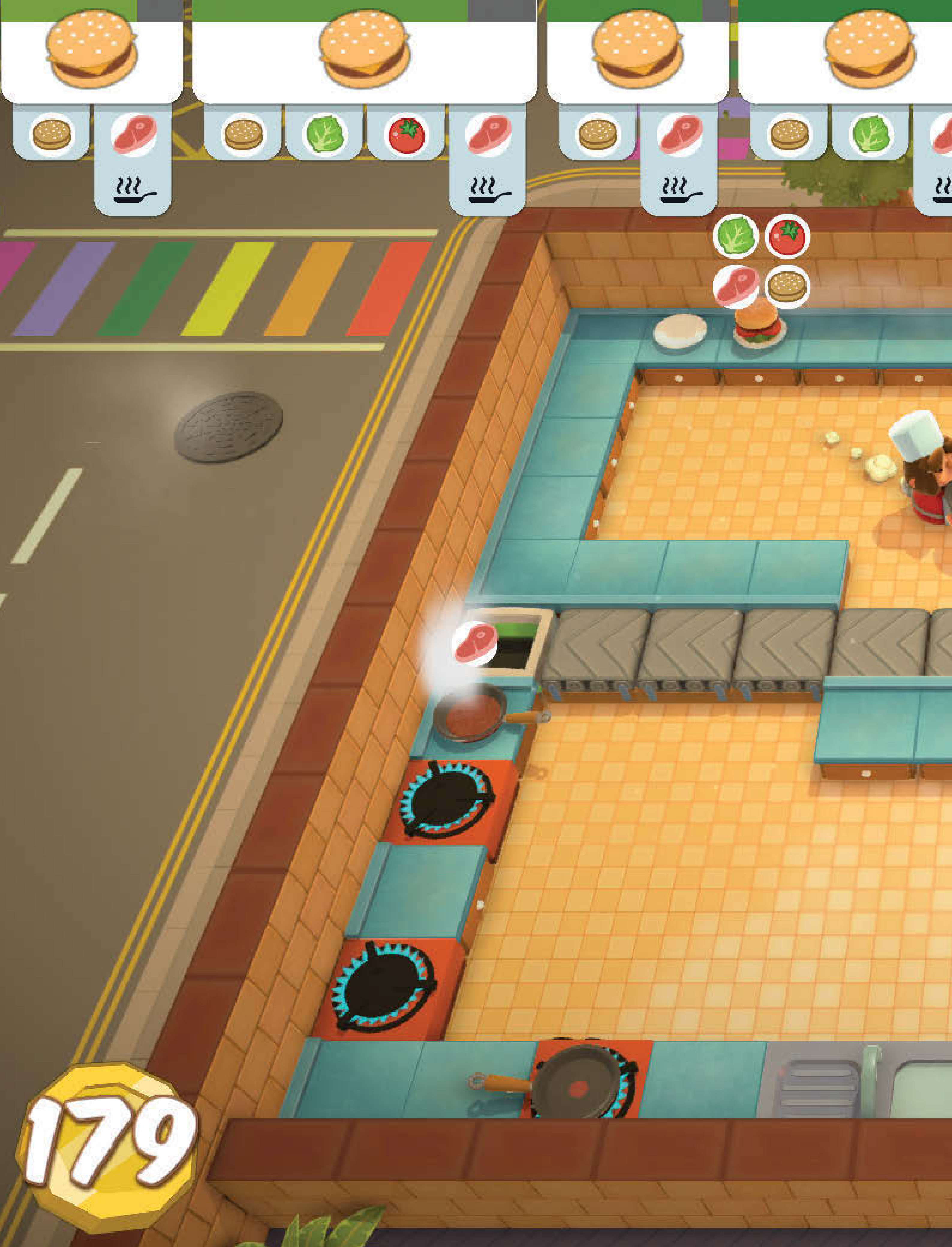
The PlayStation helped to solidify the grasp of multimedia CDs, the PS2 was most gamers' first DVD player, the PS3 was the cheapest Blu-ray player on the market for quite some time and the PS4 has proven just as capable. So, not including the upgraded drive seems like a strange move.

Does it speak to a lack of faith in the future of physical media? Is Sony seeing numbers for streaming versus Blu-ray sales that hint that UHD Blu-ray won't have much of future? We are left to speculate on such things. So, while I won't be shedding any tears over the decision to leave UHD Blu-rays out of the equation for PS4 Pro, I will be paying close attention to see how Microsoft responds.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR




179



Contents

www.gamestm.co.uk 179 | 16


16
Prey

PREVIEWS

16 Prey
18 Nier: Automata
20 Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War III
22 Dead Rising 4
24 Bloodstained: Ritual Of The Night
26 Get Even
28 South Park: The Fractured But Whole
30 Smash+Grab
30 Little Nightmares
30 Future Unfolding
30 Celeste
30 The Watchmaker

DISCUSS

08 Where is VR's killer app?
We assess the strengths and weaknesses of PlayStation VR's launch lineup

10 Life after Monument Valley
Ken Wong talks to us about making a mobile hit and what he has planned for his new studio

12 Is Super Mario Run too little, too late?
Nintendo is finally bringing its mascot to mobile, so we see if the platform master stands a chance



FEATURES

32 PS4 Pro – The last gen
Why Sony's new console marks the end of the console cycle as we know it

42 Behind enemy lines with Call Of Duty
We embed ourselves with some of the world's top COD players to see how *Infinite Warfare* is looking to tighten its eSports grip

50 Pokémon Sun & Moon
24 reasons why this new game is as different as night and day to Pokémon of old

56 Does gaming have a gambling problem?
We investigate the growing issue of online betting and the world of competitive gaming

62 Welcome to New Bordeaux
We go behind the scenes of 2K Games's *Mafia III* to see how close it's getting to New Orleans


42
COD: Infinite Warfare

REVIEWS

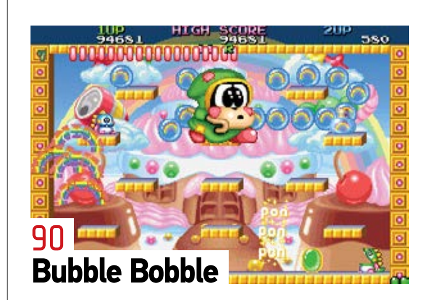
72 ReCore
74 World Of Warcraft: Legion
75 The Turing Test
76 PES 2017
78 Bound
79 Madden NFL 17
80 Grow Up
81 The Tomorrow Children
82 King Of Fighters XIV
83 God Eater 2: Rage Burst
84 This Is The Police
85 Master Of Orion: Conquer The Stars

FAVOURITES

14 Why I Love… Adventure
Harvey Smith, creative director, Arkane Studios

86 Why I Love… Ark: Survival Evolved
Agostino Simonetta, EMEA regional lead, ID@Xbox

110 The Vault
games™ sifts through the myriad accessories and add-ons the industry offers so you don't have to



90
Bubble Bobble

RETRO

90 The Retro Guide To Bubble Bobble
As Bub and Bob celebrate 30 years of gaming history, we take a look back at some of the pair's greatest moments

96 Behind the scenes of Spyro The Dragon
The original development team tells us how it managed to pull together one of the greatest platformers of the PlayStation era

102 Retro Interview: Jullian Gollop
The creator of *X-Com* reflects on what it means to have made one of the most influential games of all time and tells us what he has planned next

106 Game Changers: Burnout
It's been 15 years since this action racer brought new life and new meaning to the genre. We break down how it impacted the industry for years to come


106
Burnout

> Have your say on anything videogame related at **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum** and you could feature in **games™**

facebook.com/gamesTM @gamesTMmag www.gamestm.co.uk



32 Feature

PS4 PRO THE LAST GEN

We take a closer look at Sony's new console and what it means to industry experts and developers

VIRTUAL INSANITY

Where is VR's killer app?

→ As PlayStation VR arrives worldwide, we take a look at why it's taking so long for virtual reality games to find their stride

Hardware is only as good as its most attractive game. Potential will take you some of the way and perhaps even give you a solid launch, but without a game to pin it around it won't amount to much. It's the reason why the Wii was a massive success and Wii U hasn't been: one had experiences that really drew players in and the other has some great games, but nothing that's captured the imagination. With their intimidating price points, VR headsets have so far been impressive, but have not made themselves essential. PlayStation VR offers what could be the best compromise of price and quality, hopefully breaking through that affordability barrier for many of us. What's left to provide is the games.

It's been around two years since the announcement of Project Morpheus and the news that Sony would be stepping into the VR arena, marking the most mainstream attempt to leverage renewed interest in virtual reality. In that time we've seen a solid number of VR projects announced for the device, many of them original titles, some of them expansions to games already out or on the way. Looking at its array of launch titles we have great examples of VR's potential, but still a shortfall in terms of finished experiences.

Let's take, for example, the much talked about *Batman Arkham VR* experience. It's a fine example of how virtual reality can be utilised to offer a new angle on a brand we know well. The *Arkham* series has always been about becoming Batman and there's no greater evolution of that than being asked to pick up and place the cowl on your head. But what of the game itself? Does it have depth beyond the trick of having you feel as if you're looking in the mirror at Batman? Honestly, not really. Detective vision in full, immersive 3D looks great and is fun to play with, but it's a stationary experience; it's only a thin slice of what Batman is all about.

> "Perhaps the greatest proof of what VR could actually achieve though is Resident Evil VII"

In terms of getting that gameplay balance right, we turn to *Farpoint*, a little-mentioned FPS experience that ties in with the PlayStation VR Aim controller (it's a gun with a Move remote on the end). This feels far more robust, with forward movement and strafing movement handled on the controller, turning handled by moving your head and aiming performed by using the sights of the gun in-game. It's a fantastic effect, actually lifting your weapon in the game and in real life to get

Below We have been impressed with how accurate the PlayStation Move controllers are when combined with the VR headset. Given how old the tech is now, they still perform incredibly well.

Are you thinking about getting PlayStation VR?

Yes | No | Still need convincing

DATA STREAM → ASSASSIN'S CREED: THE EZIO COLLECTION HAS BEEN CONFIRMED FOR 18 NOVEMBER

For daily news updates and exclusive interviews



facebook.com/gamesTM



@gamesTMmag

www.gamestm.co.uk





your enemy in the crosshairs. The downside, though, is a structure that sees sections of the level loading in as you reach certain thresholds, breaking the flow of the game. On the whole it feels like a fairly basic FPS game, elevated by its VR perspective.

Perhaps the greatest proof of what VR could actually achieve though is *Resident Evil VII*, which seems like a slightly odd thing to say. This strange reboot of the series, shifting from third to first person, is a challenging concept for long-time fans, but inside the PlayStation VR headset it makes so much sense. The atmosphere, vulnerability and visuals all combine to make it one of the most immersive and affective demos we've seen from VR to date. The mind-bending experience of leaping into the VHS tape sequence of *Beginning Hour* proves VR can work as a fantastic medium for gaming, not just an enhancement to or gimmick of what we've seen before.

But compromises have still been made. Turning is not a smooth 360-degree experience, for instance. You turn in increments of about 20 degrees at a time (a change made since the E3 demo, we understand), which obviously doesn't feel very natural, but appears to have been made to reduce potential for motion sickness. What it highlights is not that Capcom has done a bad job, by any means, but even trying to maintain classic gameplay mechanics in a small way can be tricky on the hardware. Immersion can be broken by even the smallest technical compromise as developers attempt to get the best results from the PSVR hardware.

The reason why VR's killer app isn't here yet is because many titles (at least the one's we've seen so far) are too beholden to old ideas. While there are some fun twists and innovations on classic genres or characters to find on PlayStation VR, there's nothing that stands out, at the moment, as truly original. There's nothing that could only be experienced in VR. That might be asking for a lot, but it strikes us that it will take that kind of ambition for someone to make the kind of game that will make VR utterly essential.

Above There are apparently 230 developers making PlayStation VR games at the moment. A solid launch of 17 games, plus an eight-game demo with the headset, will get us started in VR from 13 October.

Below PlayStation VR Worlds has some great proof of concept material in it, but by its nature lacks some depth. Great for showing off the tech, but it needs a little more.



PSVR in the balance

→ The good and bad of some key launch titles

BATMAN ARKHAM VR

The good: Great visuals and voice acting. Feels like you're really becoming Batman.

The bad: Designed around a stationary player, so movement is warp-based. There is also limited scope for gameplay.

FARPOINT

The good: Great FPS immersion with PlayStation VR Aim Controller, looking down the sights really works.

The bad: A relatively by-the-numbers FPS experience with loading of new areas every couple of minutes.

DRIVECLUB VR

The good: The best cockpit view for a racing game you'll ever experience as you look for the apex of a turn.

The bad: Playing with anything other than a steering wheel is going to break immersion pretty badly.

ROBINSON: THE JOURNEY

The good: Great visuals and stunning scale from Crytek's sci-fi dinosaur exploration experience.

The bad: Limited interaction to climbing at the moment and turning is incremental, not full 360 degrees.

PLAYSTATION VR WORLDS

The good: Good mix of different game types and experience, with some stunning visuals and fun mechanics.

The bad: Essentially a collection of mini-games without much depth. Each game type is pretty one-note.

RESIDENT EVIL VII

The good: Fantastic immersion and terrifying atmosphere. Makes *Resi* in first person make a lot of sense.

The bad: Turning circle is again done in increments rather than fluid 360 degrees of control, which breaks the immersion.



THE LAST GUARDIAN HAS BEEN DELAYED AGAIN WITH A NEW LAUNCH DATE OF 7 DECEMBER



MONUMENTAL STEPS

Making a mobile hit

→ We speak to Ken Wong, lead designer of *Monument Valley*, about his brand-new development studio, what made his last game a success and what is to come

What lessons do you feel you learnt from the success of *Monument Valley*?
I think you learn more from your failures than your successes. *Monument Valley* was in many ways a validation rather than a learning experience. I guess I learned what you do with success – stay humble, give back, use success to do good things. I think *Monument Valley* also retrospectively gave our team a purpose – to make games for people who don't usually play games.

What do you think made *Monument Valley* such a success?
It was a perfect storm of circumstances. The team was established, yet 'rebooted' with a few new hires. This created an interesting tension in the team, between foundation and disruption, between structure and organic process. Our parent company gave us unlimited creative freedom and an undefined budget. Importantly, most of us had worked on 'failed' projects before and we learned a lot of design and production lessons, which enabled us to make a game the way we had always wanted to.

Will you be looking to iterate on some of the gameplay and stylistic choices you made on *Monument Valley* or will you be moving in different directions?
If you look at my work in art and games over the past decade, there's a lot of variety. I don't like repeating myself. The first game from Mountains will be something fans of *Monument Valley* will enjoy, but I think it's going to feel fresh and unique.

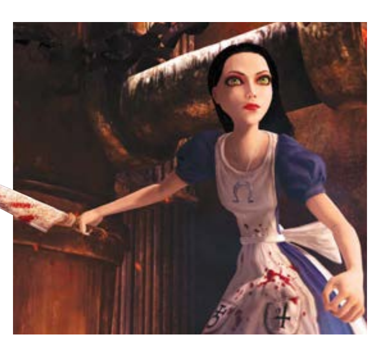
> "The first game from Mountains will be something fans of Monument Valley will enjoy"


Above The M.C. Escher inspiration behind the puzzles of *Monument Valley* made them as interesting visually as they were mentally. In actual fact they weren't always that tough to solve, but the next design was always a delight to see.

What are the unique challenges of developing a game for mobile?
The potential audience is massive, but the average mobile player has a much lower level of game literacy, and a much lower attention span. Most of those hundreds of millions of mobile device owners don't read any gaming news and rarely, if ever, browse the app store. Just finding ways of letting them know your game exists and why they should care is a massive challenge. Additionally, touch-screen games have only really existed for eight years. There is much less understanding of how to design for mobile touchscreens compared to joypads and keyboards. You can expect that VR will provide the same kind of challenges.

Mountains' first project is going to be a premium-priced mobile game, according to your site. How important is getting price point right on mobile?
I'm not sure. Many games change from F2P to premium or vice versa within their first year. Some of these transitions succeed, some fail. They are really two different sets of incentives, two different kinds of user experiences. A premium model means that acquiring users is very tough, but we aren't forced to further monetise them after the initial purchase.


Above The Mountains development team, from left to right: Kamina Vincent – producer, Ken Wong – creative director, Sam Crisp – programmer, Tony Coculuzzi – lead programmer.


Above Ken Wong also worked as art director on Spicy Horse's *Alice: Madness Returns*, another title praised for its translation of concept art to final game design.

Do you think mobile gamers are more willing to pay for games now than they were a couple of years ago?
That's difficult to say, that's really a question for an analytics service. I'm pretty sure that both now and then, only a very low percentage of mobile device owners spend any money on apps/games. That doesn't matter to me; what matters to me is whether it's possible for our team with a good product and a good PR effort to gain enough customers to sustain our business. There are enough premium success stories out there to indicate that's the case.

What else can you tell us about your first Mountains game?
I want it to be something a wide audience can enjoy. So I've spent a lot of time reflecting on things I love and enjoy and find beautiful, outside of games. Bicycles, plants, birds, that sort of thing.

The Arcade [a shared office for many developers] sounds like a fascinating setup. What are the benefits of working in such a space?
The Arcade is filled with many small independent teams, working on everything from serious games to VR development to mobile to consulting. Being all in the same space allows us to support and encourage each other. It's an incredible place full of amazing people.

What are your ambitions for Mountains?
First and foremost, I care about our employees. I want Mountains to be a great place for people to do their best creative work. Assuming we are meeting that goal, then I hope that we create things that linger in hearts and minds. The best games don't end at the game over screen – they continue to inspire us, provide comfort, provoke thought.

DATA STREAM → THE LONG-AWAITED NIOH WILL FINALLY SEE RELEASE 9 FEBRUARY 2017



Photo: Izzy Gramp

Beautiful iOS games

→ Some gorgeous games that are also worth playing

ALTO'S ADVENTURE

A straightforward enough endless runner with the added twist of downhill skiing, tricks, escalating obstacles and upgrades to earn. It's one of the more exhilarating titles in this genre.

SUPERBROTHERS: SWORD & SWORCERY EP

One of the great modern pixel art titles and the reason why Capybara Games is on the map for many gaming fans. This point-and-click RPG has a great sense of humour and fun story.

YEAR WALK

A mysterious and sometimes rather terrifying experience, *Year Walk* makes great use of a fixed camera perspective and panels of movement to enhance its puzzle-like navigation.

TENGAMI

Styled like a pop-up book and set in a classic Japanese fairy tale world, *Tengami* plays with the form by solving puzzles as if the game were really a book, pulling, turning and revealing secrets.

ADVENTURES OF POCO ECO

Part-puzzle game, part-interactive audio experience, this is as much about electronic music as it is about the crisp visuals, but even so it's a truly wonderful world to explore.

→ MONSTER HUNTER IS IN DEVELOPMENT AS A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE ACCORDING TO TGS REPORTS →

MOBILE KINGDOM

Is Super Mario Run too little, too late?

→ Nintendo is bring its mascot to iOS, but its chance for great success may have already passed

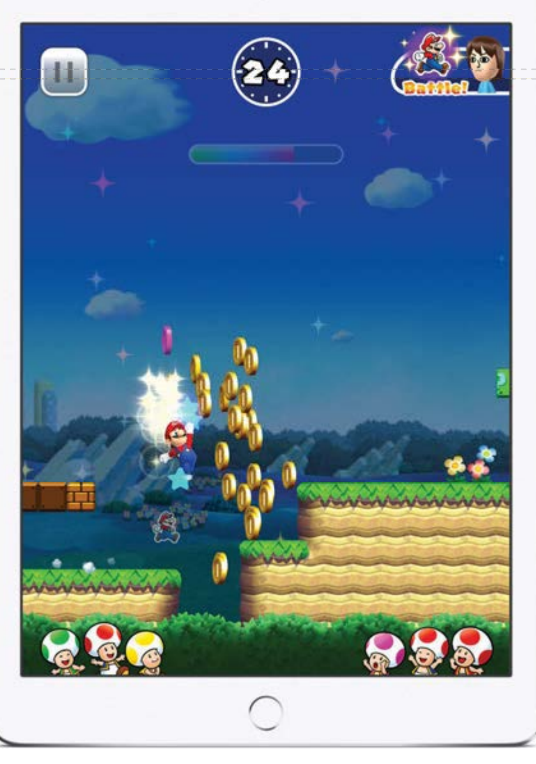
Over 30 years on from the release of *Super Mario Bros.* and yet the sight of Shigeru Miyamoto introducing a new Mario game never ceases to bring a smile to our faces. Perhaps it's just nostalgia or that we never really grew up, but that's the way it is. Miyamoto and a new Mario title are enough to see decades of gaming, cynicism and talk of 4K gaming drift away, for us at least. But is *Super Mario Run* a little too late to the party?

Fans and industry analysts alike have been screaming for years that Nintendo needed to let go of its much-respected commitment to first-party exclusivity with characters like Mario and bring them to the hugely successful smartphone world. As more and more titles have found success with the kind of family-friendly aesthetic that Nintendo excels at, the marriage of iPhone and Android with the Japanese firm's stable of franchises has made so much sense. This year the pieces of gradually been falling into place.

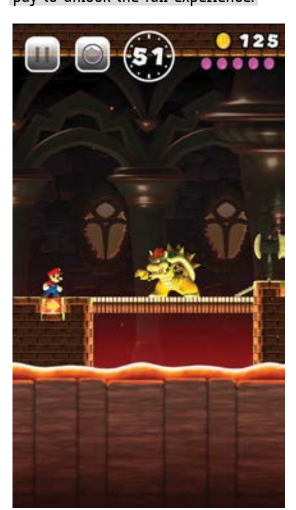
By all accounts it was the late Satoru Iwata that put much of this in motion, partnering with DeNA to develop games based on Nintendo IP. We've had Miitomo and parallel to that we've seen The Pokémon Company create one of the gaming phenomenon of the year with *Pokémon Go*. So what are the chances of Mario repeating that level of success?

It's certainly the IP best placed to achieve it and a December release for such a game as the Northern Hemisphere huddles indoors against the cold and has time to play and share their experiences. It might not have the magic hook of socialising and meeting players in the way that *Pokémon Go* does, but in a way this more private game might be exactly the antidote we needed – something to be enjoyed with friends, to challenge each other with thanks to the Toad Rally mode and to gradually master, like any Super Mario title.

The translation of the core mechanics of Mario seems to have been done very smartly and while a constant runner is hardly the most original concept, it has been proven to be the best way of translating platforming mechanics to devices without D-pad or buttons available. Does being original matter so much? Would it be churlish to suggest it hasn't bothered anyone with regards to most Nintendo titles in recent years? What Nintendo does well is perfect mechanics, interfaces and design to make them universally appealing. It may have taken a long time for *Super Mario Run* to arrive, but it's here just at the right time.



Above Nintendo is implementing a free-to-start model for the release of Super Mario Run, so it's free to download and try out, but you'll need to pay to unlock the full experience.





Above The constant runner format differs from the endless runner in that it is typically still level based, but removes the need to use a virtual D-pad for movement control. All you need to do is tap or slide with one finger.

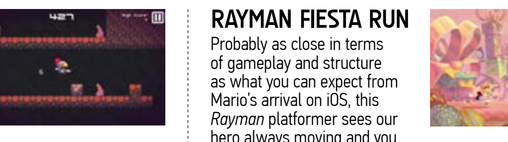
Stable Mates

→ Mario has some competition when he arrives on mobile later this year.

KING OF THIEVES

More of a puzzle platformer, adding a little of the challenge of a *Super Meat Boy* to the standard constant runner model. *King Of Thieves* also features an MMO element in that you design and defend a trophy room as well as attacking others. Its free-to-play structures can annoy, however.

JOURNEY BELOW



Something a little different, but another game with constant movement. *Journey Below* requires you to jump and attack as you descend into various dungeon stages. Bonus abilities are granted at the beginning of each level too, like a double jump or earning health from bashing enemies.

RAYMAN FIESTA RUN

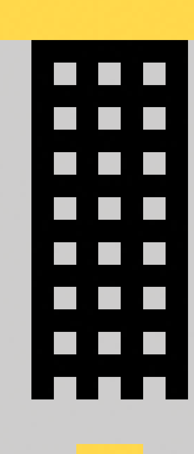
Probably as close in terms of gameplay and structure as what you can expect from Mario's arrival on iOS, this *Rayman* platformer sees our hero always moving and you just need to make sure he jumps on all the right platforms and collects as many items as possible.



DATA STREAM → POLAND IS CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF THE WITCHER III BY ISSUING A STAMP

“This was the game where I realised that elements could be randomised in a game system”

HARVEY SMITH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ARKANE STUDIOS





ADVENTURE (ATARI 2600)

HARVEY SMITH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ARKANE STUDIOS

Back in the Atari 2600 era, a game I loved was Adventure. *This was the game where I realised that elements could be randomised in a game system. It was very formative for me as a player and a creator; seeing how it worked and how the bat worked to randomise the pieces even further. You can follow that thread through to other games such as* Dungeon Master, Ultima Underworld *and* System Shock.



Prey

CONCEPT ■ *Prey* is Arkane Studio's new passion project. A sci-fi sim in which you must improvise and innovate in order to survive a deadly alien assault.

"To make this right, someone has to die"

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
Xbox One, PS4, PC
Origin:
USA
Publisher:
Bethesda Softworks
Developer:
Arkane Studios
Release:
2017
Players:
1

Developer Profile

Formed in 1999, Arkane Studios has spent many years learning from the best in the business. After stints working with Valve in secret and providing assistance on *BioShock 2*'s level design, the studio made a name for itself with the release of *Dishonored* in 2012.

Developer History

Arx Fatalis **2002 [PC, Xbox]**
Dark Messiah Of Might And Magic **2006 [Xbox 360, PC]**
Dishonored **2012 [Multi]**

After years of struggling in the shadows, Arkane has emerged as one of the brightest studios in the industry. It was through its two attempts to collaborate with Valve, going up against the grindstone on *The Crossing* and *Half-Life 2: Return To Ravenholm*, that the teams across Paris and Austin nurtured their talent for building believable fictional worlds with an undeniable presence and vitality. *Dishonored* proved that Arkane was capable, but it's going to be *Prey* that shows the world that it's able to change the state of play.

Arkane is bringing its penchant for creative gameplay, distinctive worlds and immersive stories to the realms of science fiction, reimagining the much-maligned *Prey* franchise for a new generation. It's looking impressive, too, merging a psychological twist with the sort of gameplay you'd expect to only see from games ending with the word 'Shock'.

Prey is set aboard Talos I, a sprawling space station orbiting the moon in 2032. It looks huge and foreboding, which is exciting, seeing as you can explore it all freely from the moment Morgan Yu awakens; after discovering that he needs to escape his future and fight off hordes of hostile aliens, known only as the Typhon.

> "You must survive using the tools found on the station – your wits, weapons, and mind-bending abilities. The fate of the Talos I and everyone aboard is in your hands"
>
> ARKANE STUDIOS PRESS RELEASE

We say 'escape his future', because *Prey* has a cyclical vibe to it, with poor Morgan having to constantly re-live the same day: "Monday, March 15, 2032". If we were to hedge a guess, we'd imagine death sends you right back to the start of your nightmare – every time awaking with a new suite of abilities, weapons and clues to your past life to aid your progression and eventual escape back to Earth.

Death, as it so happens, also looks to be lurking around every corner of Talos I – this is what happens when you stick a state-of-the-art R&D facility (conducting morally dubious experiments, obviously) among the stars. Thankfully, you'll have more than enough firepower to fight off the hordes of Typhon that are stalking you through the shadows.

Morgan can inherit powers from the aliens by locating Neuromods, genome-warping modifications that grant you some truly otherworldly powers. Word of advice: *Prey* won't be for the squeamish. These modifications are administered directly to the eye, in first-person – and you thought activating Plasmids was grim. Supernatural powers are an Arkane speciality, as demonstrated all throughout *Dishonored*, and so we can't help but get a little giddy with the prospect of the studio getting a little crazy here.

We've only seen a handful of the powers in action so far, but they go a long way to highlight both the kind of flexibility you'll have in bending *Prey* to fit your particular playing style. Not to mention the sort of formidable foes you'll be up against; each of the powers absorbed in *Prey* are a rudimentary imitation of something the Typhon themselves can exhibit.

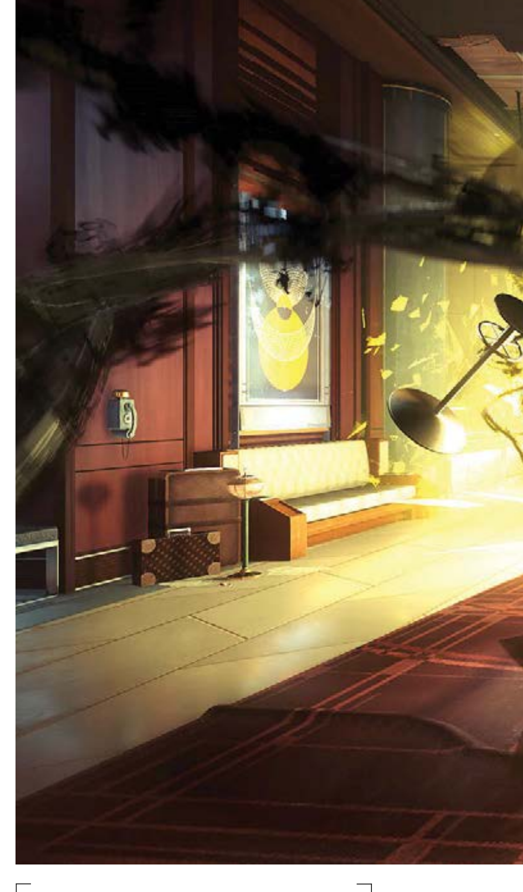
The Mimics can camouflage themselves to look like ordinary objects, for example. You can use this skill to your advantage, transforming yourself into a coffee cup to squeeze through a small window in an otherwise inaccessible room – that's the example Arkane takes great pleasure in demoing – though this ability also means that any mundane item in *any* room you walk into could be a shadowy threat waiting to make you brown your pants. Not a pleasant concept.

Another, learned from the towering Phantoms, is a Kinetic Blast ability that you can use to propel yourself into the air or push enemies away from your person; Phantoms commonly combine this with the ability to warp instantly between two areas, which makes combating them a tense and reactive experience. Another, dubbed Superthermal, creates a thermal proximity trap capable of dealing with multiple enemies at once. This is just the beginning, of course, especially when you consider that – in true *Dishonored* fashion – each of these abilities can be chained together to assist in both combat and area navigation. Whether that makes up for the sparse amount of weaponry and ammunition to be found on Talos I remains to be seen.

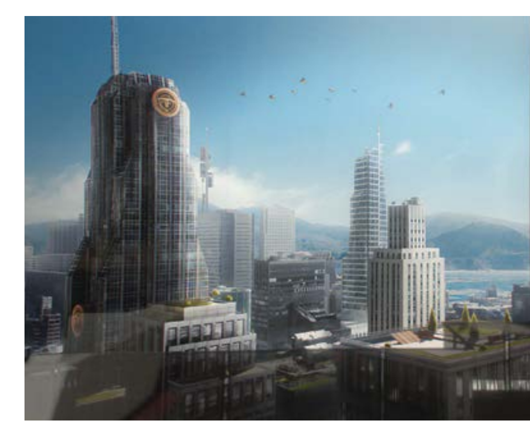
Prey seems wildly ambitious for Arkane, but that's exactly what we want to see from the studio – to see it pushing its abilities in an effort to challenge convention. Some of you may be disappointed that this game has very little (if anything) to do with the original *Prey* but, honestly, the gameplay we're seeing here seems so fun and intuitive that we just can't wait to see more of it in action.

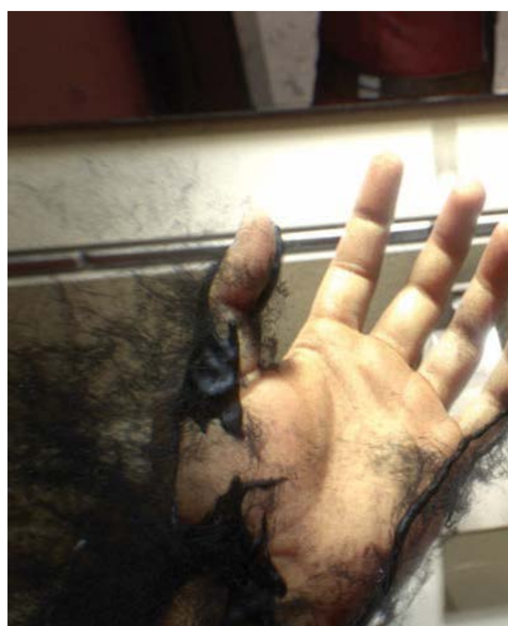
High Point

Dishonored is a classic of the last generation. It effortlessly filled the gap *Thief* had left in the hearts of many stealth fans, proving the studio had what it takes to compete with the very best in the industry.



■ Below: You can explore outside of Talos I by crafting the Artax Propulsion system, a suit equipped with propulsion jets that allows you to navigate zero-G spaces.







■ Expect to find experimental weapons hiding away on Talos I. One such item is the GLOO Cannon, which lets you freeze enemies in hardening glue before shattering them with a gunshot or melee strike. It can also be used to create ramps to aid navigation.







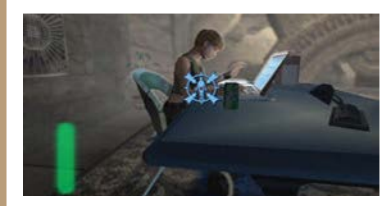
THE ANATOMY OF PREY

What games is Arkane drawing inspiration from?



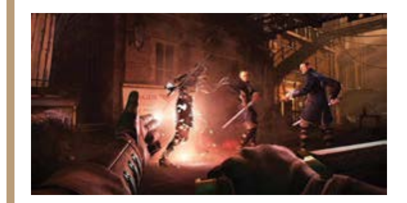
SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Ken Levine's best work to date, *System Shock 2* is a clear influence on many of *Prey*'s core ideals and systems. A hearty mix of combat and exploration, weird psionic abilities and a lonely human desperately trying to stem an infection threatening the safety of a ship and crew? Nailed it.



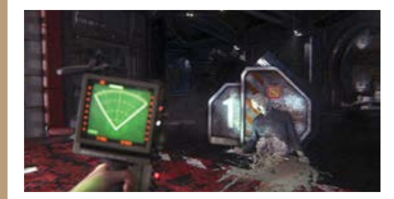
GEIST

Okay, look, we know *Geist* wasn't very good, but it's difficult to look at *Prey*'s transformative powers and not think about this oft-forgotten GameCube wasted opportunity. Its gameplay was based around you being a ghost, taking control of other objects to assist in combat and escape scenarios.



DISHONORED

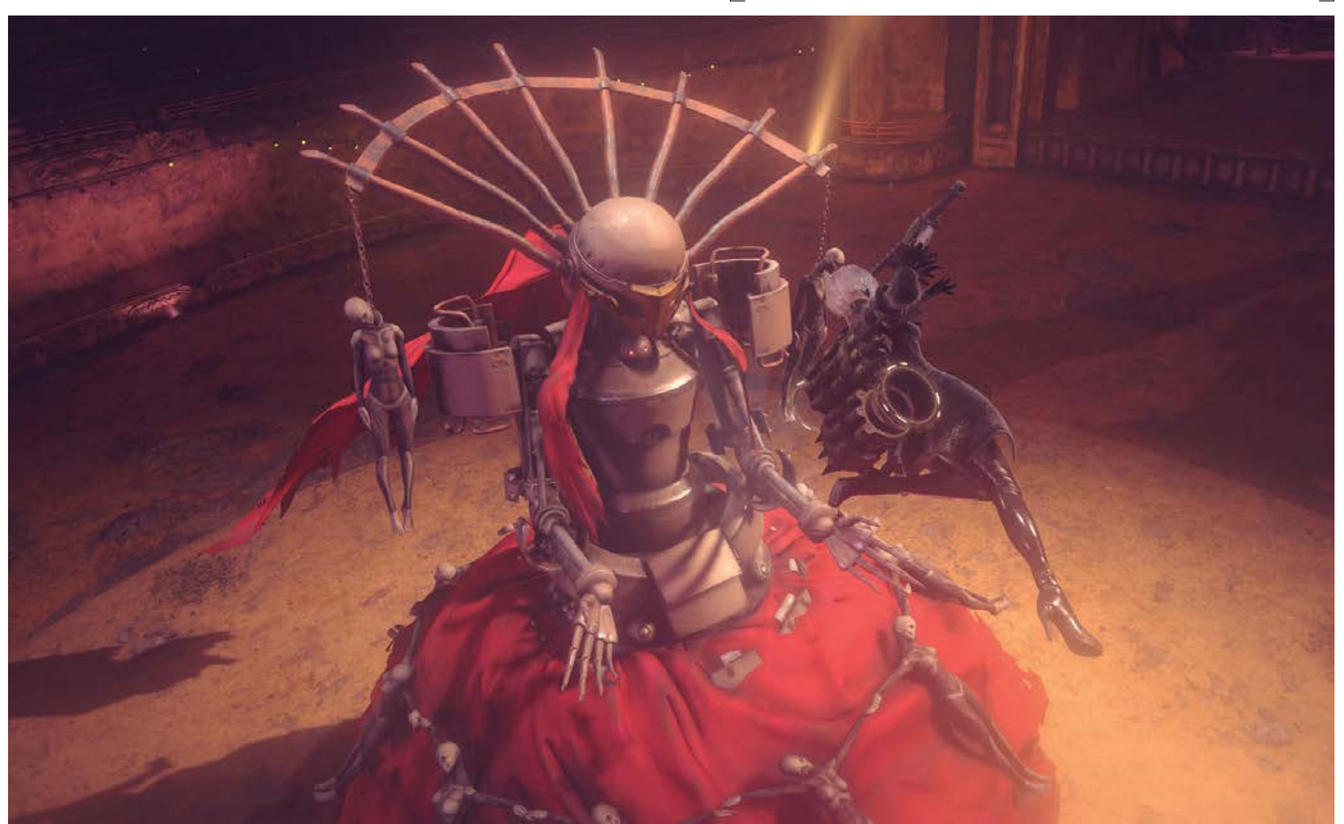
Dishonored is a fantastic stealth game, but one reason it has become such a resounding success is down to how much freedom it hands the player. You take a host of powers and constantly discover new ways in which to bend them to your will. This will play a huge role in Arkane's next project, *Prey*.



ALIEN: ISOLATION

When we hear about enemies hiding in plain sight, stalking through the shadows and threatening you at literally any time, how could we not recall nightmares of playing *Alien: Isolation* in the dark. *Prey* may not be a horror game, but it's going to lean on psychological warfare in a similar fashion to this Sega classic.

Below: We're not convinced that those boots are the best choice for this situation…
Right: The grandest of RPG traditions, *Nier Automata* has its fair share of complex boss fights.



Right: The elaborate dress of the androids you play as stands in sharp visual juxtaposition to the scenery around them, at least through those areas we've seen so far, creating a sense of being an outsider in this world.

COMBO STRING

AUTOMATA'S COMBAT INPUTS are simple, the goal being to combine the basic commands into relentless attacks. You've got a light and heavy melee attack, a jump, a dodge and a weak longer range projectile weapon. Weapon sets can be changed by tapping the D-pad and can be switched between in the middle of combos. This opens up the possibility of stringing longer combos together by taking advantage of the different swings and arcs of each part of your arsenal. Combat might not be as complex or as challenging as the likes of *Bayonetta* or *Vanquish*, but there remains room to defeat enemies in a single flurry of well-timed blows.



Nier Automata

CONCEPT ■ An action-RPG seeking to expand upon the niche success of the previous *Nier* release through improving combat, exploration and visuals.

The last game was so Nier but so far. Is Automata any different?

A cult classic game can seem like a magical artefact if you're part of its appreciation society. Unlike the mainstream, you and your enlightened few understand the true value of what is in front of you. If you are a creator seeking mainstream success, though, to have your game designated 'cult' is something of a failure. That's exactly where Square Enix found itself with 2010's *Nier*, and it's exactly what it wants to change with 2017's *Nier Automata*.

Improving on the core foundation of its predecessor's action-RPG format – as well as aiming more squarely at a Western audience – is the plan to increase player numbers this time around. Most strikingly, Platinum Games has been brought in to handle development duties. The talented studio is arguably more respected in the West than it is in its native Japan, so its hiring makes sense from a promotional standpoint.

Platinum is known for its devastatingly beautiful and mercilessly punishing approach to combat, it is not known for delivering on the kind of role-playing experience this franchise is built around. As such, this could be the developer's toughest creative challenge yet.

Combat has all the trademark pomp associated with its design team, albeit without the typically high barrier to entry. Inputs are simple, visual payoff is elaborate. Battles can be overcome through improving the stats of your characters, so don't worry about having to achieve miraculous feats of finger dexterity to progress. Various difficulty levels alter how much effort you must assign to battles, so you can up the ante if you like, but this is very much a game aimed at an RPG crowd

In an attempt to not limit the potential audience, there is no direct narrative continuation between *Automata* and previous games. Set in the distant future the plot revolves around humanity trying to stave off extinction following the successful invasion by a robot army being controlled by aliens of another world. Having been crushed so forcefully on Earth, what remains of the human population has taken up residence on the moon to avoid further casualties. You play an android built by humans in their attempt to fight back.

What we've witnessed of the core gameplay loop adheres to that of most RPGs in that you're wandering around an expansive world made up of various environments – including grassland, deserts and decaying urban centres – offering opportunities to trade, talk, fight and upgrade your gear and skills. Accompanying you is a second android that acts by itself during combat, although the idea is to be able to communicate various basic commands altering how aggressive it is. Here, again, despite Platinum's involvement, the objective seems to be the removal of too much responsibility and challenge in battle.

Where *Automata* needs to show delicacy is in the balance of its different elements and how that balance evolves through a promised length in excess of 25 hours. A flashy combat system remains tempting only for so long if visual spectacle is all it offers. Without an accompanying depth to understand and master, even the most brilliantly animated combo loses its shine after multiple viewings. Bringing Platinum into the fold might tempt new players to engage with a series they had previously ignored, but long-term gain is not going to be achieved if those same players abandon *Automata* before its finale.

> "Platinum Games [is] known in Japan as a great developer, but I think [it's] even more popular in the West. I wanted this game to be more accessible worldwide"
>
> **YOSUKE SAITO** SQUARE ENIX

Square Enix has a great opportunity to add another face to its stable of renowned franchises with *Automata*. A continued relationship between the publisher and Platinum has the potential to deliver action-RPGs of a quality above and beyond what is generally achieved. For certain, this is not a genre blessed with a wide selection of genuine classics. All too often the combat gets in the way of RPG fans' enjoyment, and the RPG components get in the way of combat fans' enjoyment.

If *Automata* can find a blueprint to solving that problem then it deserves to be heralded as a great success that has helped progress the entire medium. With Platinum on board the chances of doing so increase, but nothing is ever certain.

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
PS4, PC
Origin:
Japan
Publisher:
Square Enix
Developer:
Platinum Games
Release:
2017
Players:
1

Developer Profile

Founded in 2006 by three formerly key figures at Capcom, Platinum Games smashed its way to relevance by releasing *Bayonetta* and *MadWorld* in 2009. Since then the studio has gone from strength to strength and has carved out a reputation as one of the best action game developers in history.

Developer History

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutants In Manhattan **2016 [Multi]**
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance **2013 [Multi]**
Vanquish **2010 [Multi]**
MadWorld **2009 [Wii]**
Bayonetta **2009 [Multi]**

High Point

Bayonetta remains one of the finest action games ever created and one of the highlights of the PS3/Xbox 360 era. You owe it to yourself to play it.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War III

CONCEPT ■ Relic Entertainment brings the Dawn Of War franchise back to life, seven years after the sublime second instalment assaulted computer systems around the world.

A sequel like no other

There's always going to be huge expectations when you do a sequel to beloved games, but as developers we have to understand that these expectations exist and treat them like a challenge that is inspiring rather than something that is going to limit your creativity."

Those are some inspired words from Philippe Boulle, game director *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War III*. It is certainly no easy task, bringing a game series back to life. But in the seven or so years since *Dawn Of War II*, Relic Entertainment has had the time to consider the strengths and weaknesses of its definitive real-time strategy series; the space to consider what it was about this Warhammer property that so many found so appealing. This means *Dawn Of War III* isn't arriving as your standard sequel, bigger and bolder in the obvious ways; instead it's looking to deliver the same surprising thrills and calculated action that original release captured so resolutely.

"The biggest thing we're aspiring to here is [capturing] that feeling that people got when they first played *Dawn Of War*… they didn't have those expectations from a previous line of products. People didn't expect the quality of the first game and we want to create that feeling again. We're really trying to create a new game that is part of this lineage but is also its own game that speaks to audiences today."

It's funny really, because while the RTS genre has certainly seen some innovations in recent years, many of the elements that the Dawn Of War franchise established are still set in stone to this day. The RTS isn't a genre that sees huge mechanical leaps year on year – speaking to today's audience should be as easy as delivering a standard sequel. That puts Relic in a somewhat envious position, where lineage and genre relevancy are essentially one in the same. It means the studio can deliver "more punch and more content" but it can also strive to do more here, to "make a game that is super fun and captures the essence that we'd fallen in love with in previous games."

The results are already impressive, and that's down to Relic's clear commitment to tackling *Dawn Of War III* with a freedom to design and make sweeping changes to the core format, safe in the knowledge that fans trust in the studio's vision. "Some of that was about taking a look at elements from previous games and taking those forward, but more important than that was to set specific design goals for ourselves. Creating clear pillars is a way to steer clear of relying on just adding more of the same content."

"One of our design goals is 'spectacular battles', which we can break down and use to create clarity of gameplay and increase player agency. Things that didn't work with the idea of creating spectacular battles and didn't increase player agency weren't included and we looked elsewhere. That's how you get to a quality product that doesn't fall into that YouTube-ism of just mashing stuff together to make the game bigger for the sake of it."

> "The focus for Dawn of War has always been raw fun"
> PHILIPPE BOULLE RELIC GAMES

The result? *Dawn Of War III* is the game you've been waiting for. It's simple to say but effective all the same. From what **games™** has already seen in action, *Dawn Of War III* is everything weary fans have been asking after in the multi-year wait. There's more focus on individual heroes and the scope is being expanded out of the world-view of the Space Marines. The action is bolder and more cinematic, though the focus on deft unit placement and calculated plans of attack hasn't been diluted. It is, as Boulle would put it, "raw fun".

"My personal priority was to make the most fun RTS I'd ever seen," he says, a goal that he looks to be achieving effortlessly. "That's what we're delivering and that's what I'm proud to bring forward. Relic has a long tradition of innovating in this space and we've definitely embraced this opportunity to innovate again in the interactions between heroes and armies and a few other things, but the focus for Dawn Of War has always been raw fun."

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Relic Entertainment
Release: 2017
Players: TBC

Developer Profile

Founded in 1997, Relic Entertainment has long been one of the best and brightest propagators of the real-time strategy genre. Constantly striving for innovation and delivering expertise across both historical and science-fiction videogames. The Relic name has become an authoritative seal of quality on any strategy PC game.

Developer History

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War II **2009 [PC]**
Company Of Heroes **2006 [PC]**
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War **2004 [PC]**
Homeworld **1999 [PC]**

High Point

It's difficult to name just the one, but *Dawn Of War* was a milestone release, proving that Warhammer could be popular outside of its core fans. This is a series for all, no matter whether you've ever spent evenings building and painting models or not.





■ Right: Space Marines are still the main faction in *Dawn Of War*, though Relic has put a lot of work into ensuring all factions feel fully fleshed out.



■ Above: Relic has been careful to update any mechanics and systems it thought were worth saving, though it hasn't been afraid to cut a few out either. Despite this, the studio is eager to point out that none of the depth has been scaled back. Below: *Dawn Of War III* isn't expected to launch until Spring 2017, which is plenty of time to get your PC upgraded – you'll need a lot of processing power to get the most out of it.

IMPROVING THE POSTER BOYS

"The Space Marines have always been the cover boys for *Dawn Of War*. I'm a Space Marine player from way back and I love them, but they've always been the vanilla faction to some extent," admits Philippe Boulle, noting that Relic is putting a lot of resources into improving the core *Dawn Of War* faction this time out. Space Marine players rejoice – they aren't going to be the vanilla faction any longer. "They've sometimes [fallen] short compared to the amount of personality and character we've been able to give the other factions. We really wanted to double down on their mechanics and their moment-to-moment gameplay, instead of having them feel flash only in the late game."

> "Did you know Frank West moisturises his knuckles, hates baseball and is a little touchy about his age? Well now you do"
> GEOFF COATES CAPCOM VANCOUVER

Dead Rising 4

CONCEPT ■ Frank West returns to the town where it all began to fend off the seemingly never-ending zombie horde, unravel some mysteries and take a few snaps.

With great powersuits comes great irresponsibility

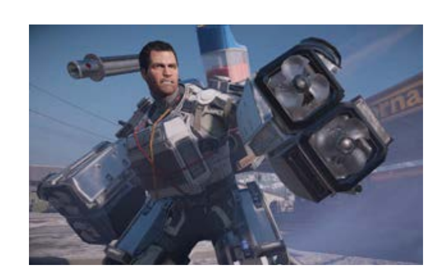
If there was a mantra at Capcom Vancouver when development began on *Dead Rising 4* we have to imagine it was 'get out of the way of the fun'. Seems like a solid thing to get started with, don't you think? The thing is that laying all else aside in favour of fun can have its good and bad points.

From its earliest days Dead Rising has been carrying some rather anachronistic gameplay elements that rather got in the way of us fully expressing ourselves in the sandbox. The save mechanics of the original release, for instance. The crafting systems, health systems or having to hunt down medication. The list goes on, and with time, one by one, these more restrictive features have given way to easier, less binding models. But did those previous restrictions actually help give the game just a little bit of weight and consequence?

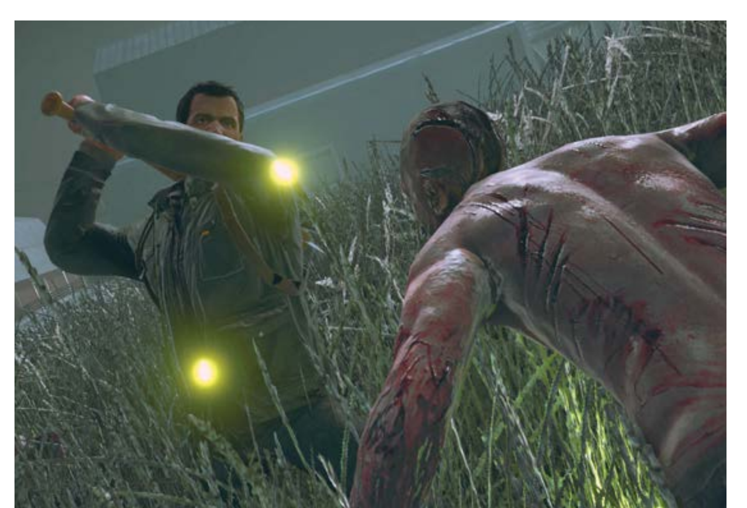
Take, for example, the health system. *Dead Rising 4* is introducing regenerative health, which on the surface is a thing to be celebrated. While it was always fun finding out what concoctions of foodstuffs might create a health potion in this series, we can't deny that having to use up weapon slots with nosh supplies was a little frustrating. But combined with even more powerful and insane armaments, Frank's return to Willamette now feels a little toothless.

But that's only true when faced with the horde on its own and this is where we hope *Dead Rising 4* will offer a new level of threat, as the newly infected and Evo zombies should make things more challenging. The newer zombies are ravenous and vicious, moving with more threat and intent than the shambling masses that occupy most of the game. The Evo zombies are some other breed entirely, working in packs to hunt you down and only partially infected by the zombie virus. Their use of cover and fast movement should add an interesting challenge.

Ultimately, though, we can see the logic of these changes, easing up the minute to minute demands on us to manage our inventory or health and freeing us up to play around in the zombie sandbox. We can hack some undead to pieces, craft some mad motor vehicles and generally have a good laugh, and when we need something a little more robust to do, we have some new zombies and some aggressive survivors to work with later on. Getting the balance right between those two things is the last hurdle for this team, and given that each successive release has felt like an improvement, we're hopeful that this *Dead Rising* will get it right.



■ Above: Frank's exosuits only have two-minutes of use in them, so get your superhero jollies as fast as you can as you don't have long to make the most of it.



INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox One, PC
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Developer: Capcom Vancouver
Release: 6 December
Players: 1-4

Developer Profile

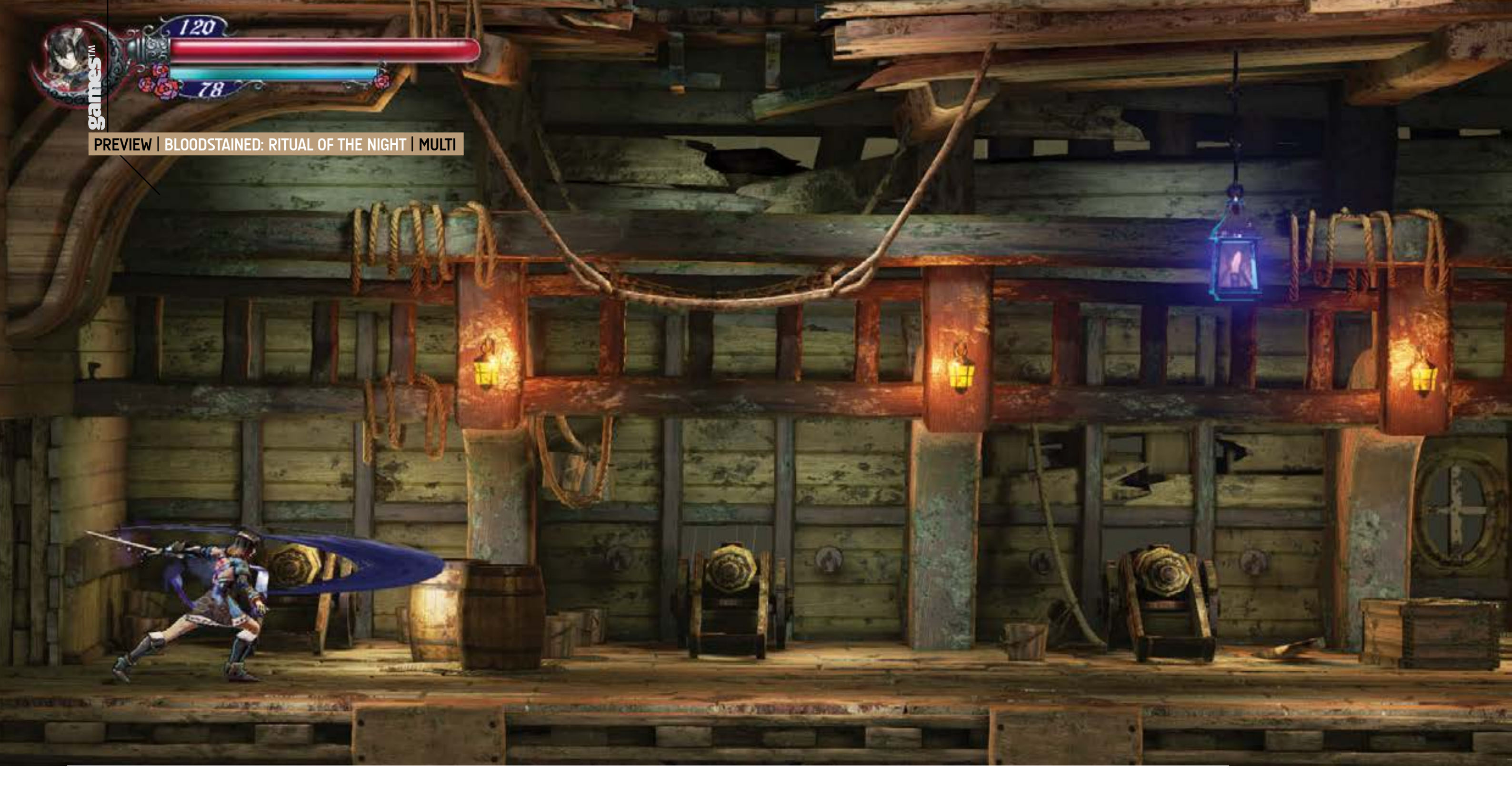
Founded as Blue Castle Games in 2005, the Burnaby, British Columbia outfit started life as a baseball game developer for *The Bigs* and *MLB Front Office Manager* through 2K Games. It was quite a surprise then when it was tapped up by Capcom to develop *Dead Rising 2* and it's been making the series since.

Developer History

Dead Rising 3 **2013 [Xbox One, PC]**
Dead Rising 2 **2010 [Multi]**
MLB Front Office Manager **2009 [Multi]**
The Bigs **2007 [Multi]**

High Point

Dead Rising 3 was perhaps not as expansive as it could have been, but it felt like the final realisation of the sandbox promise and hilarity of the *Dead Rising* concept.



Bloodstained: Ritual Of The Night

CONCEPT ■ It's Castlevania, only not. *Bloodstained* has everything but the name – creator included – and stands to be possibly *the* most fan-pleasing metroidvania out there.

We meet Koji Igarashi to discuss his new, fan-powered project

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, PS4, Xbox One, PS Vita, Wii U
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Inti Creates
Release: Q1 2018
Players: Asynchronous online multiplayer

Developer Profile

Koji Igarashi doesn't look like your typical game developer. There's a certain ruggedness to his presence that befits his propensity to wear a fedora and carry a whip around in public settings. He could pass for a Japanese Indiana Jones, and his work – most notably on many Castlevania titles – reflects this.

Developer History

Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night **1997 [PSOne, 360]**
Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance **2002 [GBA]**
Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow **2005 [DS]**

High Point

Castlevania was already an established and respected name in gaming back when *Symphony Of The Night* was released, but nobody could have guessed how wonderful and impactful the game would be. Not only did it layer depth and twists on the Castlevania formula, it also effectively established the entire concept of metroidvania as a genre.

How did you make your Kickstarter so successful?

Timing is very important when Kickstarting because a lot of them fail – I was actually very surprised that our Kickstarter not only succeeded, but hit around 11 times the original funding goal! I was even more surprised that the initial goal was passed in the space of around two hours.

There are two things that I think we were successful with: firstly, we were collaborating with a person who was very knowledgeable about the Western market, and they provided a lot of insight. The second was that we were clear with users that fan movement and participation was vital for the success of the game.

Seeing as you blew past your funding target, do you feel you have more or less freedom than a typical indie game?

I don't really feel that this is an indie game. This is because it's kind of a user-demanded game. I wanted to make the game, but it is also very much user-driven, not just me creating something that I want to make.

In terms of freedom, well, because a large number of users have control of the direction of the project, there's not quite as much freedom as you might think. There are elements that I would like to introduce into the game, of course, and I am doing that.

You're developing the game for a great many platforms. Has this slowed production?

We're focusing on the PC right now and will be using middleware to branch out into consoles later. Multiple systems is something that's going to become an issue later on.

The Wii U, in particular, is tricky. I'm thinking about what's happened with that console, expecially with NX developments. I think I'm going to have a talk with the backers next year and decide what the best course of action might be.

What do you feel best sets *Bloodstained* apart from Castlevania?

I feel that the world of the game is completely different. It's not a game centred around Dracula this time around. It's also set in England and there's a lot of alchemy taking place, which helps set it apart from Castlevania.

It is a game for the fans, though. They're aware of my work and I have to create a great game for them. It's kind of a chance for fans to revisit the kind of experience they had in the past.

I didn't feel a lot of pressure when working in a series title at a company. You're expected to do similar things over and over again – the pressure is limited. Now, at least, I'm not asked to make the same thing every year. It would be a waste, though, for this to end with just one game. So as long as fans are willing to support me, this could become a series. It all depends on how successful *Bloodstained* is; if it doesn't sell, it can't really become one.

How have the artists felt about giving the fans a say in some of the game's visual styling? Is there potential for selectable shader options down the line?

We showed artwork to the fans and backers. We started with two different shader styles, and the fans asked us to raise the quality. After this, we came up with a third, and this was the one that was chosen. We felt like we had to give the fans a say; it's been a very important part of the process.

For the PC version, at least, we're considering an on/off option for the graphic shaders. This would make the game bulkier, but it is something that we'd like to do.

When is the last time you played *Symphony*? Do you have any regrets from that design that you're still learning from?

I've not actually played *Symphony Of The Night* recently – it is a title from 20 years ago. Actually, while this is even *longer* ago, I do still regret that the previous game, *Rondo Of Blood*, wasn't released outside Japan until years and years later on the Virtual Console. I always felt like it was a bit rude of me not to have made it available to the wider fanbase.



IT'S ALL THERE!

WITH *STREET FIGHTER V* having come out in what was effectively an unfinished state earlier this year, we took a moment to ask Igarashi about comments he made in the past about Bloodborne having a 'staggered' release.

Amazingly, he wasn't aware of Capcom's little blunder at all, and seemed amazed that such a thing could even happen. "With regard to the staggered release, we still haven't decided the absolute specifics, but we are definitely going to release a complete single-player experience where you can play from beginning to end," he said, eager to clarify that nobody will be left out in the cold. "Otherwise, as a product, well… it won't be a very good one."

We're not going to argue with that.

"Since we've never let people play a game at such an early stage before, we feel lucky to have had so much support"

KOJI IGARASHI INTI CREATES

As for the core game design itself, well, early parameters never really evolved and were still the same in the released product. Some of the save room locations were not very well considered. Also, aesthetic things like the menu – it didn't feel like it was designed with the game in mind at all; it was like a programmer had just made something for function and left it in the game without the artists looking at it. Oh, and Alucard's shield was strong to the point of being unbalanced. I actually have a lot of regrets.

I've learned a lot from these, and from users, too. A lot of things are also being filtered by fan request; if the users want certain types of items, they will probably appear in the final game.

How do you go about level design? Do you take a personal or team-based approach?

It's not a personal thing. We draw the levels as a team, planning them on paper then moving them into our computers. Each one is a part of a larger map; each of these has its own theme and they are designed around these themes.

Do you feel any pressure to really show what Japanese indie teams can do?

In terms of development, I can only do what I can – the results of these efforts remain something that is still to come later. I'm going to do the best job I can and just kind of hope for the best. I am very happy with how the visuals are coming along. I also think the controls feel great – I am very happy with how it plays.

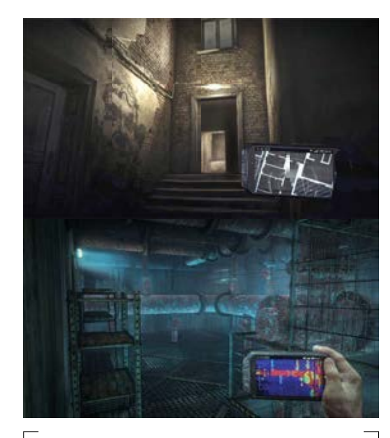




Above: Stained glass seems to be a recurring visual motif in much of the art that has been released thus far.
Left: The E3 demo, since being released to Kickstarter backers of the 'sixty dollars or higher' tier, has been very well received. It's a positive early showing, and a great boost to the general sense of confidence surrounding the project.



"Get Even is the biggest title that has ever been produced in our studio"
WOJCIECH PAZDUR THE FARM 51



Above: *Get Even*'s phone has multiple functions, allowing you to scan for clues to help unravel the mystery of the game, track enemies and navigate your way around various locations.

Get Even

CONCEPT Cole Black has woken up without any memories, save for an attempt to save a teenage girl with a bomb strapped to her, so can he piece his past back together?

Tactical smartphone action

There comes a point in a game's development where you would hope that any mysteries surrounding its gameplay mechanics and perhaps even genre would be set aside, but nearly three years in and we're still not clear on *Get Even*. What started out as an interesting FPS premise involving multiplayer adversaries in a single-player narrative and impressive scanning tech being used to render insanely detailed locations, now looks like a psychological horror experience mixed liberally with high-tech military hardware and some kind of VR experience. But then, who's to say that these ideas are mutually exclusive? We're just not sure.

Get Even has essentially been reannounced thanks to a publishing partnership between developer The Farm 51 and Bandai Namco. The new big tech selling point is Auro-3D technology, which promises cutting-edge 3D acoustics. Visually, it has lost a little of its oomph from our earliest impressions of the game, but that's really only because so much time has passed. It's really not a bad looking title at all, albeit that many of its locations are rather drab and grey at the moment. The addition of some more colourful and outdoor locations will hopefully stop the game from feeling like a throwback to the grey and brown days of early Xbox 360 titles.

The gun combat in the game doesn't look amazing at present, but it's not entirely clear how much time will be spent needing it.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: Poland
Publisher: Bandai Namco
Developer: The Farm 51
Release: Q2 2017
Players: 1-TBC

Developer Profile

The Farm 51 has been working in some interesting areas of FPS development over the years, dipping its toes into action adventure briefly and ill-fatedly as it turned out with *Deadfall Adventures*. Still, it's a studio that has shown some promise and it's been working on *Get Even* for some time.

Developer History

Time Ace **2007 [DS]**
NecroVisioN **2009 [PC]**
Painkiller: Hell & Damnation **2012 [Multi]**
Deadfall Adventures **2013 [Multi]**

High Point

The Farm 51 has yet to have much by the way of critical success, but its stab at *Painkiller* showed some promise. Tech advancements with *Get Even* will hopefully pay off.

What's becoming clear though is that with your protagonist's memory lost, you'll be piecing together the mystery of a girl you believe you were supposed to be saving, possibly flashing back with the help of a VR device (Oculus Rift support has been on the cards for some time). Thanks to a handy smartphone you'll be investigating the locations you visit, attempting to gather evidence, all the while threatened by some creepy characters and more real-world militarised adversaries. There's a definite *Condemned* vibe coming off the whole affair, which is no bad thing in our eyes.

We had always expected that *Get Even* would be more or less a straightforward FPS experience and some of that appears to have been retained thanks to things like a form of CornerShot gun that lets you aim around corners. Moving from moments that feel like they're straight out of *Outlast* to those that could be part of a stealth section in *Call Of Duty* is going to be an interesting challenge for The Farm 51 to balance.

Some of the combat at present looks a little stiff and overall the animations aren't looking as good as they could, but The Farm 51 has indicated that with Bandai Namco's support it has more resources available now for polishing the game up. It feels as if *Get Even* has moved a far distance away from its original concept, but there's still some promise here.





1

2

QUANTUM FIST
Punch a distant foe with science

South Park: The Fractured But Whole

CONCEPT ■ South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone once again join forces with Ubisoft to create a sequel to the critically acclaimed *South Park: The Stick Of Truth*.

Could this be the best RPG of 2017?

There's something remarkable about the South Park games. It's a franchise that hasn't been at its best for a while now, with Trey Parker and Matt Stone seemingly becoming more disinterested with their creation – now approaching its twentieth season – by the month. But *South Park: The Stick Of Truth* was a genuine breath of fresh air. Legendary developer Obsidian handled the 2014 gem, though the sequel, *The Fractured But Whole*, has been handed off to Rocksmith's Ubisoft San Francisco development team. Does that mean the RPG mechanics or sick sense of humour are going to be watered down? Not likely. In fact *The Fractured But Whole* seems to be more intuitive, offensive and absurdly funny than South Park has been in years. By all accounts, this is looking to be one of *the* must-play RPGs of 2017.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: USA
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft San Francisco
Release: Q1 2017
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Established in 2009, Ubisoft San Francisco was responsible for developing the Rocksmith series and the technology that drove it. It's a purposefully small team, designed to be agile in the development space, promoting an 'indie vibe' above all else.

Developer History

Rocksmith **2011 [X360, PS3, PC]**
Just Dance Kids **2014 [Multi]**
Rocksmith 2014 **2013 [Multi]**
Tetris Ultimate **2014 [Multi]**

High Point

In an effort to teach a generation of Guitar Heroes real guitar, San Francisco built a game that pushes you to learn some of the best rock songs out there. *Rocksmith* was a great, albeit expensive, idea.

1 IT IS BUILDING DIRECTLY OUT OF THE SHOW

If you really want to understand what in the hell is going on in *The Fractured But Whole*, you'll want to make sure you watch two important episodes of South Park: S13 E02 and S14 E11. This is when The Coon, Carman's superhero alter-ego, is first introduced and, subsequently, when he begins leading the other kids of South Park in a crime fighting team known as Coon & Friends. This game is building out of those episodes, giving you the chance to experience the South Park universe at night with an all-new mischievous story.







"The kids are playing superheroes and Cartman is determined to turn Coon & Friends into the biggest superhero franchise of all time"
UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

2 YES, YOU CAN STILL CUSTOMISE YOUR CHARACTERS

Given that superheroes are such a huge part of *The Fractured But Whole*, it should come as no surprise that customisation plays a significant role. From the start of the game, you'll be able to select your one-of-a-kind costume, craft an original back story (which is usually bloody horrible) and begin to build your unique super powers. Ubisoft San Francisco is working hard to bring more depth to the RPG elements of the game to let you develop and refine your character throughout the adventure, with improved looting and crafting systems making their debut in *The Fractured But While*.

3 YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN SOUTH PARK LOOK QUITE LIKE THIS BEFORE

During the day, between school hours, you'll be able to do a little investigation into the goings on in South Park, but it's when everything is draped in moonlight that you'll be able to hit the streets as a superhero. It's at night when the kids of South Park face the villains of the land head on. Ubisoft San Francisco is promising that "The number of things to do and see in South Park is effectively doubled after dark, giving even the most ardent fans an all-new experience of exploring the living world of South Park."

4 IT'S BEING BUILT USING THE SAME ENGINE AS THE DIVISION

The Fractured But Whole is receiving a huge upgrade to its game engine, as Ubisoft San Francisco takes advantage of Massive Entertainment's proprietary Snowdrop engine, used to create *The Division*. That means we are seeing an overhaul of, well, just about everything. Art and animations from the show are being lifted to give a more authentic experience, while the combat systems are far more intuitive than that of its predecessor. Truth be told, at this rate, *The Fractured But Whole* will look better than any production Matt and Trey could ever hope to pull off in their weekly show.

5 EXPANDING THE COMBAT TO INTRODUCE TACTICAL DEPTH

South Park has never been all that deep, but that's about to change. Ubisoft San Francisco – replacing *Stick Of Truth* developer Obsidian – introduces an all-new combat system. The basic turn-based system is out, replaced by rural battlefields that utilise a grid to help you plan attacks. You'll now need to consider character placement and formations, as well as cooldowns and move types as before. New combat classes – based on classic superhero archetypes – and the improved tactical edge mean getting into scraps isn't the chore it once was.

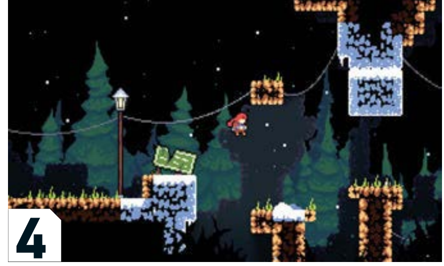
SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

1


2


3


4


5


SMASH+GRAB

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **United Front Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

1 You may remember United Front Games as the developer of *Sleeping Dogs* and *ModNation Racers*, and this is the team's latest project. It's a multiplayer loot-a-thon and beat-'em-up as you create a small band of players and AI to take on an opposing force, looting shops for upgrades and materials to defeat your enemy. It's all set in a classic neon dystopia and seems like a good mix of *Triad Wars* with a MOBA. Melee combat appears to be the main focus, but moves are varied, the team dynamics offer lots of class variation and there's interesting tactical ideas there. It's in Early Access on Steam right now.

LITTLE NIGHTMARES

Format: **PS4, Xbox One, PC**
Publisher: **Bandai Namco**
Developer: **Tarsier Studios**
ETA: **Q2 2017**

2 Bandai Namco has recently stepped in to published this fascinating game from Tarsier. It's a fantastic looking game with a dark stop-motion animation style. There are moments of gameplay we've seen that remind us of *Alice: Madness Returns*, just darker and more foreboding. We've been keeping a close eye on Tarsier for a long time, waiting to see when the team would produce a solo project after years of working with Media Molecule on *LittleBigPlanet*. It's had a few false starts over the years, but with this and PlayStation VR title *Statik* on the way, we're excited to see the Swedish team show what it can do.

FUTURE UNFOLDING

Format: **PS4, PC**
Publisher: **Spaces Of Play**
Developer: **In house**
ETA: **Q1 2017**

3 Mixing procedural animation and hand-designed objects, *Future Unfolding* is an adventure puzzle title where every new game should feel unique. While the world's style stays the same, the puzzles you encounter and the types of creatures who might aid or attack you will change. The team has compared it to a mix of *No Man's Sky* with *The Witness*. The game doesn't let you attack, so getting around enemies requires speed, smarts and a little luck. The whole point of the game is to solve the mystery of what exactly this world is that you've found yourself in. It's a fascinating project and well worth keeping an eye on.

CELESTE

Format: **PS4, PC**
Publisher: **Matt Makes Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

4 This collaboration between *TowerFall* creator Matt Thorson and *Skytorn* artist Noel Berry is already playable, albeit in a relatively basic form. The pair actually developed a playable prototype for the web in just four days that gives you a good impression of the final game. With a level design aesthetic not dissimilar from *Super Meat Boy*, *Celeste* lets you grab on to flat vertical surfaces for a short time, meaning you can hold and leap from wall to wall. Throw in a one-use short air dash before landing on the ground again and you have all the mechanical makings of a challenging action platformer. It looks really nice too.

THE WATCHMAKER

Format: **PS4, Xbox One, PC**
Publisher: **1C Company**
Developer: **Micropsia Games**
ETA: **Q2 2017**

5 There are a handful of projects at the moment playing around with the idea of ageing protagonists and time manipulation, and *The Watchmaker* is one of the best looking we've seen. You play as Alexander, the maintainer of a clock tower who, when the tower is apparently sabotaged, begins ageing abnormally fast. What happens next is a 3D platforming puzzle game in five locations with plenty of time manipulation in a steampunk world. The art style is reminiscent of a Tim Burton animation, which works nicely with the theme. Boss fights help to break up all the leaping and time trickery along the way.

PS4 PRO
THE LAST GEN

AS WE TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT SONY'S NEW CONSOLE AND WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT 4K GAMING, WE ALSO ASK WHETHER THIS IS THE END OF CONSOLE GENERATIONS AS WE'VE COME TO UNDERSTAND THEM

Does 4K really matter? It's hard to say at this point. Unlike the move from standard to high-definition over a decade ago, we're not necessarily going to see a massive improvement in character modelling and realism with this new TV compatibility. What we will see is smoother, crisper experiences, something more incremental, and that's what the PS4 Pro (and we assume Xbox Scorpio) represent; incremental changes.

This is a massive shift in approach for Sony and Microsoft, who sat on the same tech for six or seven years before finally beginning a new round of hardware. Now we have improved performance from both hardware manufacturers only three years into this cycle. It's closer to the Apple method of a new iPhone every year with incremental improvements along the way. It means that hardware should never be left lagging behind innovation. If something exciting happens in the technology world, we could see it under our TVs in a matter of months.

But what does that mean for us, the gamers? Are we going to be expected to upgrade our consoles every 12 months to keep up with the new tech? Will some of us be skipping models every couple of years to save ourselves some money? With so many questions it seems only right that we turn to the game makers and tech analysts to get their expert insight.



WHAT IS THE PS4 PRO?

GETTING TO THE HEART OF SONY'S 4K MACHINE

■ The best way we can describe the PS4 Pro is to say that it is 4K ready. It's going to be delivering games in native 4K resolutions, albeit early titles will be offering above 1080p resolutions and upscaling them from there. It doesn't promise a massive leap forward in realism, physics or gameplay, but it does offer tighter framerates, crisper visuals and a more accurately displayed colour palette.

What that means is that it's the best console on the market to get the most from your 4K TV, should you already have one or be planning to get one in the very near future. And if you don't have a 4K TV, the PS4 Pro will still provide the best in class console performance around with 60fps and 1080p all but guaranteed on every game you play, assuming that's what the developer wanted to provide.

It's also still 'for the players', but for the first time that statement now appears to exclude the PS4 being a general entertainment machine. With no 4K Blu-ray playback, streaming of video content in 4K is the only option you'll have. It focuses the disc tray as a gaming interface first and foremost, making the PS4 Pro a machine for those who game first and watch movies second. The PS4 Pro then is a revision and focusing of what the PS4 has always been, the most powerful machine on the market.

THE SPECS EXPLAINED

WHAT'S INSIDE THE PS4 PRO AND WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

MAIN PROCESSOR

Single-chip custom processor: Same as in the original PS4 and new slimmer model.

- **CPU:** x86-64 AMD Jaguar, 8 cores: Same CPU as in the original PS4 and slimmer model. The clockspeed has not been revealed, but Sony says it is faster than the original PS4, measured at 2.1GHz by some compared to the base console's 1.6GHz. This should give it slightly improved processing power for non-graphics related information.

- **GPU:** 4.20 TFLOPS, AMD Radeon based graphics engine: More than twice the graphical processing power of the 1.84 TFLOPS of the PS4. This is where the PS4 Pro will get its higher-quality rendering of images, more objects, better lighting, higher framerates and higher resolutions.

- **Memory** GDDR5 8GB: Same RAM as original PS4 and new slimmer model.

- **BD/DVD drive** (read only) – BD × 6 CAV, DVD × 8 CAV: Same Blu-ray drive as original PS4 and new slimmer model. Not capable of showing 4K Blu-rays.

- **External dimensions** Approx. 295×55×327 mm: 20 percent larger on volume than the original PS4.



WHAT IS 4K?

THE BASICS OF THE NEW HD STANDARD

4K TVs or UHD (Ultra High Definition) TVs refer to sets that are capable of around 4,000 horizontal pixels compared to the 1,920 pixels of most high-definition TVs. The 4K standard began in film, but with the 16:9 ration of most TVs, most UHD sets are actually 3,840x2,160 pixels. That's ultimately 8 million pixels all together versus the 2 million you can expect from an HDTV.

"The new console is primarily targeted at higher fidelity graphics and smoother framerates," Mark Cerny, the architect behind the PS4 told fans via PlayStation's official YouTube channel. "These are great areas to focus on because they don't alter the fundamental gameplay. The creator's vision is just represented in a richer fashion. Developers and publishers have also been quick to adopt the new platform."

So, this really sets out the ambition of the machine, to embellish what was there and allow more room for game-makers to express themselves and their ideas. Not necessarily something that you would think developers were struggling with on the PS4 so far given the titles already out, but room for growth is no bad thing. At least one developer we spoke to has been calling for an upgrade like this for some time.

"I was very excited about the machine," Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software told us. "I remember when (Mark) Cerny came to visit us and we were talking first about the decision to double the RAM in the PS4, and he was probing me for what I think should be next. I recommended a move along the lines of the Pro and he said, 'Oh you'd like that would you?!' Months later when I got briefed, I realised he was already way ahead of me. So I was naturally extremely excited."

"We heard about the plans a while ago and we were really excited for two reasons," begins Guerilla Games' technical director Michiel van der Leeuw. "Firstly just of the concept, launching a new console mid-cycle, staying ahead and delivering much richer gaming experiences at that moment is great. Not having to completely redesign for a new architecture or having to split our fanbase was also a plus.

"The other reason was more intrinsically the excitement about what we could do with the power and new hardware features of the machine. 4K and HDR really help *Horizon: Zero Dawn* as it visually tries to be close to a nature documentary, where resolution and dynamic range make a huge impact."

This all marries with Cerny's statement from the PlayStation Pro reveal that work on this upgraded, 4K-supporting console started almost immediately after the launch of the PS4 in 2013. Even so the timing was a surprise to Lewis Ward, IDC's research director for gaming. "The PS4 slim is a fairly basic and predictable refresh of the base model but the Pro was a surprise to me. I figured the swirling rumors were wrong and Sony wouldn't come out with a clearly more powerful console at the same time as a standard refresh. It brakes with historical precedent and since they're winning the 8th gen console race handily I didn't think they had a need to launch the Pro."

Put like that, the timing does seem a little surprising, but then we have to wonder if the announcement of Project Scorpio by Microsoft might have forced Sony's hand somewhat. With the promise of a new Xbox that will be the most powerful console ever made, boasting six teraflops of graphics processing power arriving in late 2017, the PS4 Pro needed some room to itself, and perhaps set the terms of what we should expect from a 4K gaming machine.

"PS4 Pro will be backwards and forwards compatible when it comes to the vast majority of games, apps and services," says



Ward. "Scorpio will be able to do things the Xbox One S simply won't be able to do. Microsoft runs the risk of leaving many more existing Xbox One gamers behind, and angering them, but it will have a more powerful system that will also help change the competitive dynamic versus Sony."

Leaving players behind is a big concern, but one that Sony addressed in a way by announcing an HDR patch for all PS4 models. It rather cements the idea that this is not a new generation, but rather a embellishment of the current round of consoles, only that it now begs the question, is this the end of console generations as we know them?

"The medium is ever evolving and the market is always moving," says Pitchford. "So, the industry must be Semper Gumby - always flexible."

Ward however sees the PS4 Pro as more of a quarter step forward compared to Project Scorpio's half-step towards a new generation of machines. "The Pro is really just a PS4 that's able to play 4K/UHD content. Nothing else big should change. Scorpio, as advertised, is a far more serious upgrade and would really represent an 8.5 generation console that one could argue will break the mould that's dominated the home console market for the past 20 years."

So, this is the beginning of the process. The first step towards a new model for how consoles are released to us, but is that something we should feel good about? Should those of us who picked up consoles early this generation feel aggrieved at newer, more powerful models releasing only three years later?

"I think the primary thing about PlayStation Pro is VR and there's a bit of the question of whether it means that actually PlayStation 4 isn't going to be capable of doing as good VR as people may have thought it would," suggest The Chinese Room's Dan Pinchbeck when we caught up with him for the rerelease of *Dear Esther* on Xbox One and PS4. "I think the upgrade is mainly about that, but consoles aren't made by the hardware, they're made by the games that are made for those consoles, so that's what really matters."

Of course, Pinchbeck is absolutely right in this respect. Specs alone do not make a great console, although they can help to draw in a little attention. Showing what the PS4 Pro can do for new titles like *Horizon: Zero Dawn* and *Spider-Man* is pretty hard, however, as was proved by the live stream of Sony's announcement event in New York. As Mark Cerny talked up the impact of HDR colour and 4K upscaled graphics, those watching at home were left to wonder what the fuss was about. Those of us in New York saw something truly transformative.

"Yeah, like VR, it's kind of a 'see it in person thing' to really get it," is Ward's insight. "I told Sony they should post game clips where half the screen is 4K and/or HDR and the other half is 1080p, which is today's PS4 baseline. You won't get the full effect since the video itself will be rendered less well on a normal HD screen, but I still think the difference will be self-evident. HDR is a lot more 'contrasty' if that's a thing, and the colors are richer and subtler. I suppose it's the job of the TV makers to help educate the public as well, so it's probably going to be a multi-year process either way."

WHAT IS HDR?

WHAT'S SO EXCITING ABOUT HIGH DYNAMIC RANGE?

■ The point of HDR (high dynamic range) imagery is to show the widest possible range of colours and shades where bright colours become brighter and dark colours become deeper. It also means that you can more easily see objects in light and dark because there's a greater range of tones on your TV set with which to pick them out.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT **PROJECT SCORPIO?**

SUMMING UP MICROSOFT'S HOLIDAY 2017 CONSOLE UPGRADE

Microsft took the rather bold step (and some might say rather confusing step, also) of announcing its next console at E3 this year as well as the upgraded and slimmer Xbox One S. Project Scorpio is being pitched as the most powerful console ever made, which it's easy to believe given the small details we know set against the PS4 Pro.

We know, of course, that the Scorpio will boast 6 teraflops of graphical processing power, compared to the PS4 Pro's 4.2 teraflops. That's a pretty substantial difference and it will be helped by the predicted RAM for the console running at 384GB/s compared to the Pro running at 218GB/s. What we don't know about yet is the CPU. This was improved marginally for the PS4 Pro, so a significant change here for the next Xbox could be a big win.

Beyond that we would expect a UHD Blu-ray player to be built in as that would be an easy victory over the PS4 Pro from Microsoft, exclusive games for the console are likely in the medium to long term and VR compatibility has been assured, although what headset it will support has yet to be confirmed. Pricing wise, anything between £400-500 is being predicted by most. With what's being promised it won't be a cheap machine, but it might be worth it.

PS4 VS XBOX ONE: ROUND 2 COMPARISONS

WHAT EACH CONSOLE OFFERS

	PLAYSTATION 4	PS4 PRO	XBOX ONE S	XBOX SCORPIO*
HDR	✓	✓	✓	✓
4K NATIVE GAMES	✗	✓	✗	✓
4K UPSCALING	✗	✓	✗	✓
4K STREAMING	✗	✓	✓	✓
4K BLU-RAY PLAYBACK	✗	✗	✓	✓
OPTICAL OUTPUT	ORIGINAL MODEL ONLY	✓	✓	✓
1TB HDD MODEL	✓	✓	✓	✓
BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY	✗	✗	LIMITED	LIMITED

* UNCONFIRMED DATA, BUT BASED UPON STATEMENTS MADE BY MICROSOFT AND CURRENT TRENDS



From a developer perspective, no more convincing is needed as the additional power is very exciting according to Pinchbeck. "It's a more powerful machine!" he exclaims. "It allows us to support the min spec with a stock PS4, but for power users to get higher performance or fidelity or both in the same software. It's a beautiful decision. With having multiple tiers we developers are motivated to support the stock system and reach a high quality standard, but the power users have an option for faster framerates or more pixels on the screen."

"The PS4 Pro allows us to get closer to our vision of a lush and vibrant living world," adds van der Leeuw. "For people with a 1080p TV this means we'll increase image quality by supersampling, anisotropic filtering, better shadows (we still have to decide how to tweak all these best). If people have a 4K TV, we can give them much higher resolution, which really enhances the experience, especially when combined with HDR."

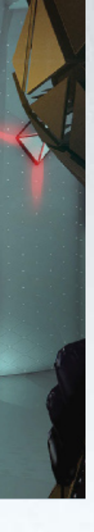
So, this could well prove to be the moment when traditional generations fall away in the games industry, where manufacturers begin a new cycle of hardware releases interspersed with upgraded specs every few years to keep their machines relevant and competing with the PC market. It makes some business sense and even some sense to us as players, delivering the kind of refreshed spectacle we always like to see. But does the PS4 Pro really have what it takes to begin this trend?

If there's one concern over Sony's new hardware, it's that it didn't scale up everything about the PS4 equally in delivering this new machine. An improved graphics engine will help with HDR and 4K to some degree and help a lot with VR, supporting Pinchbeck's thoughts on Sony's priorities there, but what about the CPU, which has had only a marginal overclock upgrade?

"I'll trust that Sony's engineers looked at that cost-performance trade-off and saw that they could get to UHD support at 30 frames per second by simply overclocking the preceding CPU, and decided the additional expense wasn't necessary," is Ward's expert assessment. "We'll see if they turn out to be right – and we'll know that if some titles wind up needing to downscale from UHD a bit to stay above 30 frames a second."

The PS4 Pro looks like the end of the old generational cycle, so even if we do see a PS5 or a Xbox Two they won't be quite the same leaps ahead that we've come to expect. They are more likely to be like new smartphone models, with key features gradually seeing upgrades on a more consistent basis. What that could also mean is some of us get left behind. While 'forward compatibility' will mean many titles will be playable on old and new devices for some time, no guarantees have been given that PS4 Pro exclusive titles won't come down the road in the future.

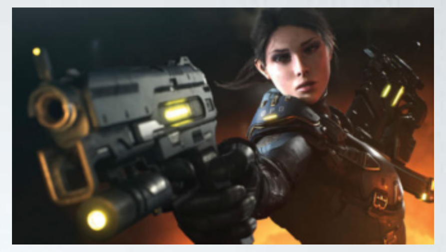
And we're not sure we'd want such a guarantee. New hardware needs games that could only be achieved on their specs and that should go beyond resolution or contrast ratios. All that remains to be asked now is, will you buy a PS4 Pro yourself, wait for Project Scorpio or join the world of PC gaming and be shot of the whole circus?



CONFIRMED **PS4 PRO** GAMES

THE TITLES READY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PS4'S NEW PROCESSING POWER

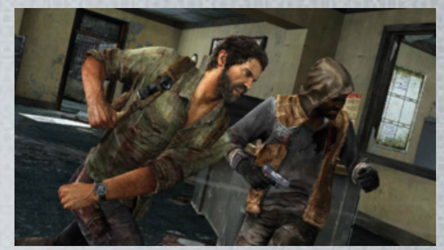
ALREADY RELEASED



PARAGON Improved performance on 1080p screens, enhanced visual effects, higher scene complexity, improved texture detail, dynamic reflections.



THE WITNESS Improved performance on 4K screens, improved resolution of at least 1440p upscaled to 4K, consistent 60fps. All text and UI in native 4K resolution. 1080p and 60fps on HD screens.



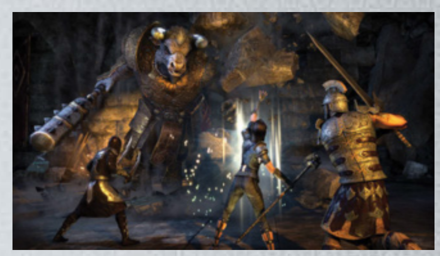
THE LAST OF US: REMASTERED Improved performance on 4K and HDR screens, high dynamic range colour and lighting. Native 4K visuals.



INFAMOUS: FIRST LIGHT Improved performance on HDR screens, high dynamic range colour and lighting.



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END Improved performance on HDR screens, high dynamic range colour and lighting.



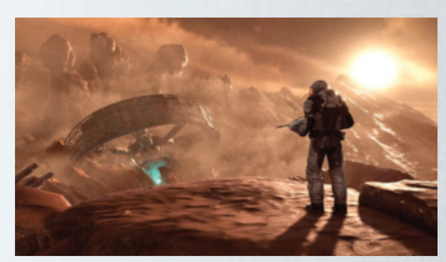
THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE: TAMRIEL UNLIMITED Improved performance on 4K screens, native 4K visuals.

UPGRADES TBC: Call of Duty: Black Ops 3, Deus Ex: Mankind Divided, FIFA 17

UPCOMING RELEASES



DAYS GONE – TBC 2017 Support for HDR colour and lighting, likely upscaled resolution on 4K screens.



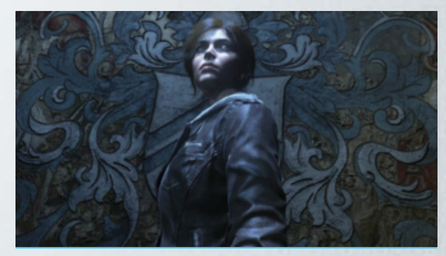
FARPOINT (PLAYSTATION VR) – TBC 2016 Improved texture quality.



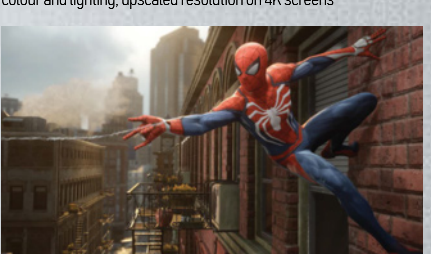
HORIZON: ZERO DAWN – 28 FEBRUARY 2017 Support for HDR colour and lighting, upscaled resolution on 4K screens



MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA – TBC 2017 Support for HDR colour and lighting, upscaled resolution on 4K screens.



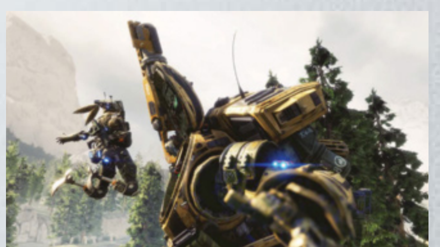
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER – 11 OCTOBER Support for HDR colour and lighting, upscaled resolution on 4K screens.

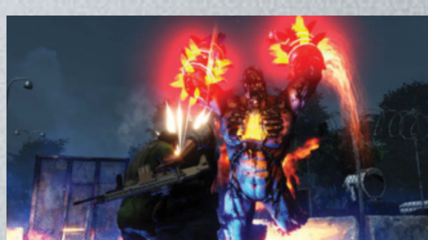


SPIDER-MAN – TBC 2017 Support for HDR colour and lighting, upscaled resolution on 4K screens.



WATCH DOGS 2 – 15 NOVEMBER Support for HDR colour and lighting, upscaled resolution on 4K screens.





UPGRADES TBC: *Battlefield 1, Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare Remastered, Dishonored 2, Final Fantasy XV, For Honor, Ghost Recon: Wildlands, Killing Floor 2, Steep, Titanfall 2*

Images: Courtesy of Netflix



DOES 4K BLU-RAY MATTER?

MISSED OPPORTUNITY OR STRATEGIC GAMBLE?

Since the days of the original PlayStation, Sony's consoles have been Trojan horses for new disc media solutions. The original machine promoted the use of CDs, the PS2 became most gamers' first DVD player, the PS3 helped win the format war for Blu-ray over HD DVD and now you would think that the PS4 Pro could help to solidify the place of 4K Blu-ray at the forefront.

Except no such functionality is being included in the PS4 Pro and according to Sony it cannot be patched in later. In its stead Sony is touting 4K content from Netflix and YouTube. Given the legacy of these machines, this is very surprising, but is it terribly important? Sony seems convinced that 4K streaming is the future, not Blu-ray and as one of the primary powers behind the rise of Blu-ray in the first place, we're inclined to believe it. Bear in mind also that Sony has only just recently announced a native 4K Blu-ray player, unlike in previous generations when it would also have been making standalone devices for CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays prior to a new console.



Netflix has a number of fantastic shows available in UHD, including Marvel's Luke Cage, available now.

PC COST COMPARISON

HERE'S WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO MATCH THE PS4 PRO WITH A CUSTOM RIG

CPU

We've seen a few different attempts by others building a PS4 Pro-like PC to get close to the custom Jaguar CPU. It is however the one piece of the puzzle that refuses to be closely repeated. While the AMD FX 8350 is very close in most regards, it runs at almost twice the speed. The AMD APU Athlon 5350 Quad Core Processor is closer in clock speed and far cheaper.

PRICE RANGE: £34-134

GPU

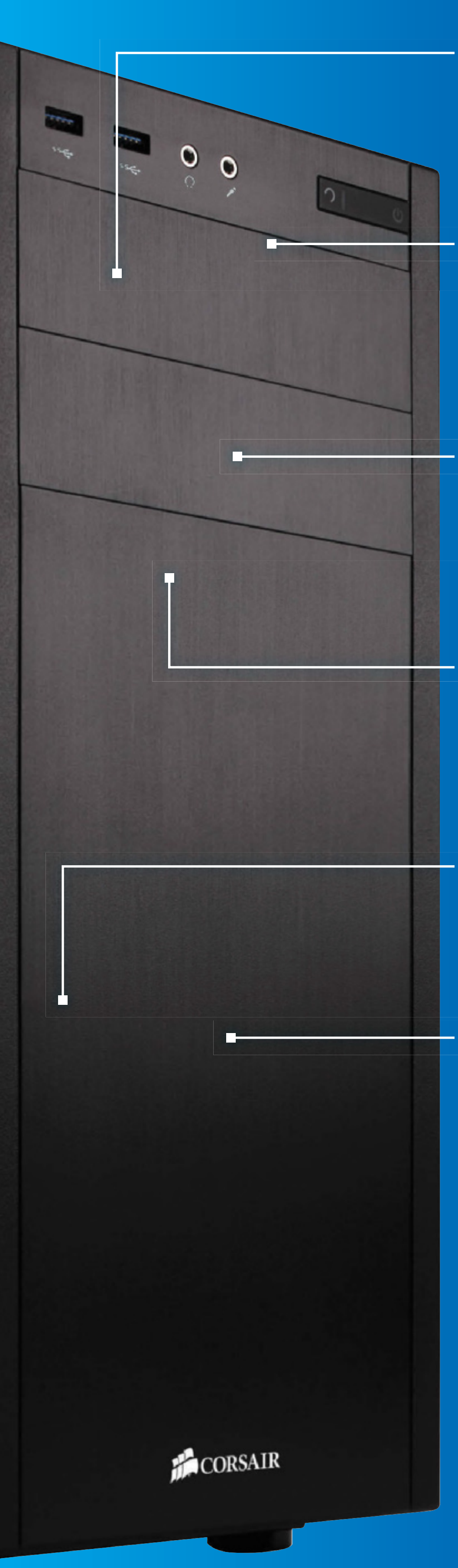
The PS4 Pro's AMD Radeon is a far easier thing to match with the AMD RX 480 running at around 5.2 TFLOPS, which is a little more powerful than the one Sony uses, but not far off. There's rather a large range of variations in the RX 480, but the 8GB GDDR5 memory capacity seems fairly consistent. Depending on other bonus features, it's probably the most expensive element of setting this up yourself, but not the most costly GPU on the market.

PRICE RANGE: £240-260

MOTHERBOARD

You're probably not going to get very far without a motherboard to run this all through, so something like a Gigabyte GA-970A-DS3 seems about right. A scalable link interface is the key thing to be looking out for as well as making sure the motherboard is compatible with your chosen CPU and Windows 10.

PRICE RANGE: £50-70



RAM

Since the PS4 is mainly concerned with graphical output it doesn't approach memory in quite the same way as a PC needs to, but since 8GB of DDR RAM is no great hassle, that's not a huge concern. Something in the HyperX Fury range should work rather well.
PRICE RANGE: £30-80

HARD DRIVE

Storage prices are pretty reasonable these days so a 1TB hard drive for your build won't set you back too much, especially if you're not going for a solid state drive (since the PS4 Pro doesn't have one), not that they're terribly prohibitive either. Something from Western Digital or Seagate should do nicely here.
PRICE RANGE: £45-70

BLU-RAY DRIVE

Obviously we weren't looking for UHD Blu-ray player here, since the PS4 Pro doesn't feature on. There are plenty available, like those from Pioneer, available on Amazon and other retail sites. They won't cost a massive amount to add to your system, but you could choose to go digital only.
PRICE RANGE: £50-70

CASE

Even though the PS4 Pro is a bit of a beast, we doubt you'll be able to get all of these components onto a chassis of similar proportions, so no great need to spend a fortune on the PC case either. This Corsair Carbide 100R, for example, will likely cover you.
PRICE RANGE: £30-50

PSU

No need to go overboard on the power supply, but something between 300 W and 450 W should get you what you need. Something like the Corsair CX430, for instance.
PRICE RANGE: £40-50

OPERATING SYSTEM

Can't run a PC without some form of operating system and since we're not going to be running the PlayStation OS we may as well turn to Windows 10. The Home Edition will set you back £100.
PRICE RANGE: £99.99-189.99

SUMMARY

Depending on parts you could probably put together a PC of around the same spec as a PS4 Pro for not too much money, but getting anywhere close to as low as £349 seems unlikely. That said, limiting yourself to these specifications wouldn't make much sense in a PC build where you could do a far better job of balancing components. It's ultimately Sony's proprietary software and tech that will see this console punch above its weight.

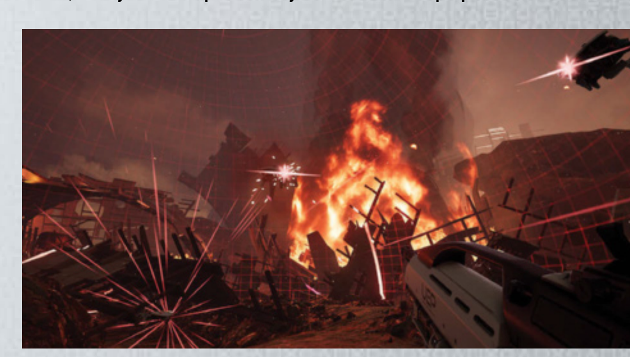
TOTAL COST:
£618.99 – £973.99



IS PS4 PRO THE REAL VR MACHINE?

HOW THIS ALL EFFECTS YOUR VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE

From what we've experienced so far from the standard PlayStation 4 running VR, there are no great concerns about performance for the console. Sony seems to be doing well in enforcing minimum framerate specs from game developers and that's helping to maintain smooth experiences across the board so far. That all said, the additional graphical processing of the PS4 Pro will undoubtedly have an impact. Framerates should be a little better across the board, graphical fidelity could be improved and the Pro should be capable of some improved visuals too. As developers grow more confident in the VR space we would expect to see great improvements made to the VR experience as time goes by, and the PS4 Pro is in the best position to take advantage of those, ready with the power they will need to keep up.





WHAT **4K TV** DO YOU NEED?

TIPS FOR FINDING THE RIGHT SET TO COMPLIMENT THE PS4 PRO

The world of TVs has evolved and become a little foggier than when HDTVs were all the rage. Things like contrast ratios, which were once so important, are now a more difficult thing to trust when buying a TV. For the UHD TV market there are a whole new bunch of things to look out for. Here are the most important stats and language to look out for.



WATCH YOUR NITS

A nit is a measure of luminous intensity, basically how bright something is. You might also see it written as cd/m2 (candela per square metre) measurement, but they're the same thing. The industry standard for ultra high-definition TVs capable of HDR differs between LCD and OLED screens, so you'll need to look for different things depending on the set you're getting. For LCD you want at least a minimum black level of 0.05 nits, preferably as low as 0.0005 nits. You also want a peak brightness of at least 1,000 nits. With OLED screens you should look for a minimum black level of 0.005 nits and a peak brightness of 540 nits.

OLED OR LCD?

There are actually three different screen types around with two variations of LCD as well as OLED panels available. LCD IPS (In-plane switching) panels are great for reduced motion blur, but not as good at contrast, while LCD VA (Vetical Alignment) panels have much better black levels for stronger colour contrast, but poorer performance with motion blur. OLED on the other hand is the best for colour contrast as each pixel emits light and can be switched off for perfect darkness, but it's the poorest for motion blur, ghosting and has the potential for screen burn with bright HUD elements. Performance can vary on all three however, so trust your eyes first and foremost.

REFRESH RATES

■ High refresh rates on your TV are generally considered to be good, although some of the methodology of each set to reach these figures can lead to complications. A 60Hz TV will perform fine, for instance, but 120-240Hz should reduce motion blur. The trouble comes when you look into these higher refresh rates, as some content doesn't have the additional data needed to fill that rate of image refreshing and the TV will have a method of filling in those gaps. Depending on how well it's implemented, it can lead to blurring and muddying of the picture as your brain interprets the image shifts your eyes are picking up. There has also been some fudging of numbers on this one from some manufacturers, so again you need to trust your eyes above all else.



COLOUR STANDARDS

■ While 4K uses a colour standard called Rec 2020 to measure its palette, most UHD TVs currently use the slightly lower limit of something called DCI P3. Rec 2020 is more of a cinematic standard and the UHD model isn't far off. That said, many TVs will only reach a percentage of the total colour palette of DCI P3, but that's usually something you can find out. The industry premium standard is considered 90 percent of DCI P3, for example, so getting close to that figure or better on your TV means you've got one that will display a fantastic array of colours.



LATENCY ISSUE

■ Perhaps the biggest challenge when finding a UHD TV, particularly one that supports HDR, which is really the difference making technology here, is input lag or latency. Many UHD TVs will include a gaming preset designed specifically to reduce latency between the images being transmitted from the console to them appearing on screen. Of the top rated TVs for gaming, input lag of 21ms looks pretty good and with HDR activated 43ms is considered ample. Lower numbers are obviously better if you can find them, especially if you're a fan of fighters where latency can be a massive issue for gameplay.





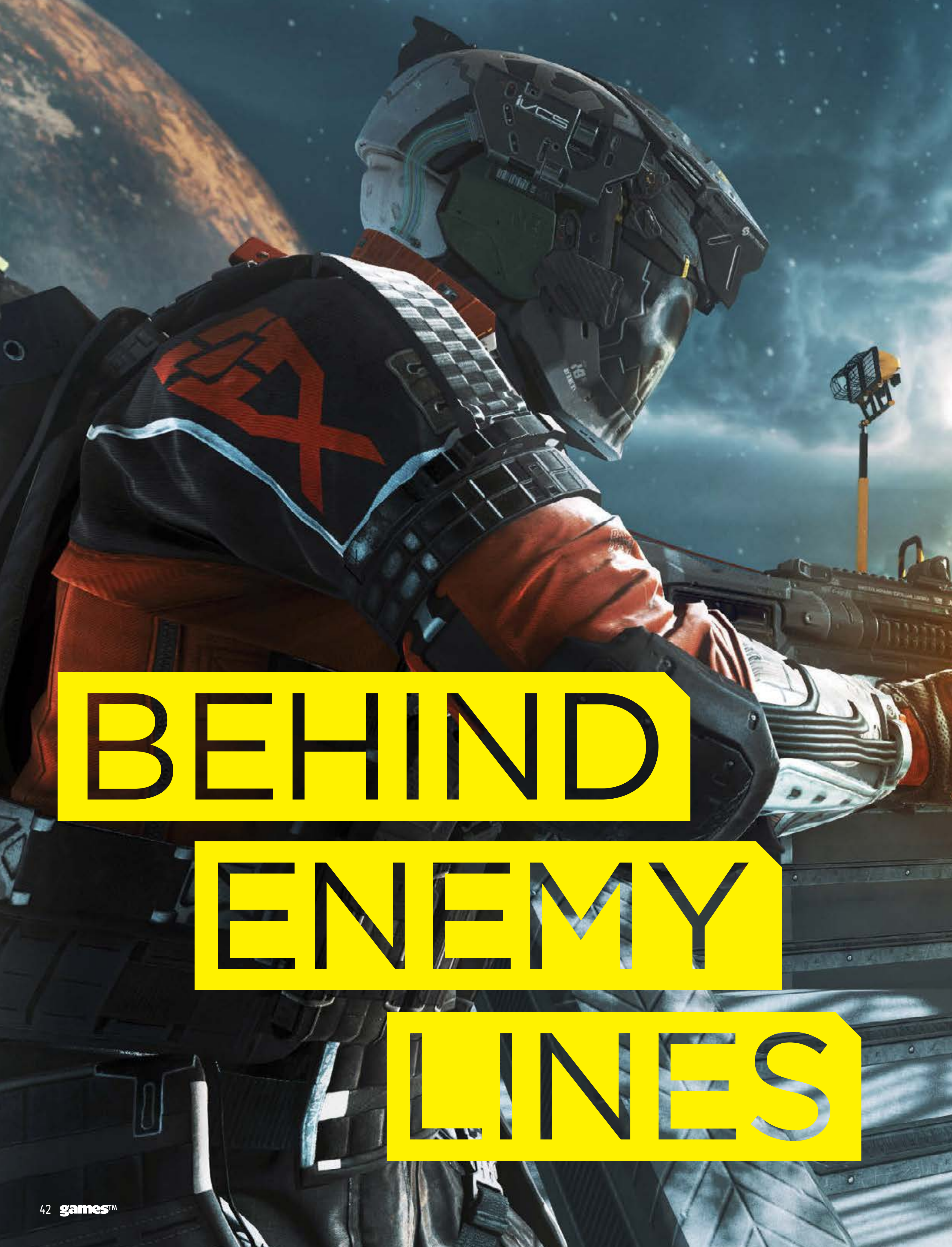


WHY **HDR** IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN **4K**

SERIOUSLY, THIS IS A BIG DEAL

■ While the ability to work up to native 4K for many developers will be exciting, most seem far more taken with the idea of using HDR in their games. We've seen this already from Playground and The Coalition, working on *Forza Horizon 3* and *Gears Of War 4* respectively. They love the additional colour, depth and lighting clarity that HDR gives their games, especially when it comes to the sky.

Clouds might not seem like a massive deal, but they are often flat in games, not permitted to break and reflect light in quite the same way as real clouds do. Adding such functionality into titles such as *Uncharted 4* gives them even greater degrees of realism and is bringing games closer to the colour and detail that their teams intended. Switching back to standard colour feels muted and flat by comparison. This is the innovation you want to get involved with as soon as possible.



BEHIND ENEMY LINES



EMBEDDED WITH PRO PLAYERS, YOUTUBE SENSATIONS AND RAVENOUS CALL OF DUTY FANS, **GAMES™** GOES TO GREAT LENGTHS TO BRING YOU THE LATEST INTEL ON **INFINITE WARFARE** – BECOMING SWALLOWED IN THE CHAOS OF CALL OF DUTY WORLD LEAGUE FINALS IN THE PROCESS

YOU HAVEN'T TRULY LIVED UNTIL YOU'VE ATTENDED AN EVENT DEDICATED ENTIRELY TO CALL OF DUTY. It's a swirling, sweaty maelstrom of testosterone; a contained cultural calamity where blood-curdling screams can be heard echoing from areas unseen, the distress unknown; an opportunity to lose your bearings among a sea of black hats, each burning with the vivid green Monster branding – as if *these kids* need any more taurine pumping through their veins.

Okay, so they aren't kids, per se, but it is all too easy to feel the cruel grasp of time in this particular environment. Surrounded by *Call Of Duty: Black Ops III* pro players from around the globe, 32 teams of four are all fighting for a slice of a $2 million prize pie.

Then there are the rock stars of the industry, the YouTube and Twitch elite that have touched down in Los Angeles, California to cause chaos with a camera and catchphrase. They cannot move a muscle without being mobbed by waves of adoring fans.

The most impressive group, however, are the FPS pilgrims. Thousands of weary travellers that have paid out of pocket to travel in to Inglewood's iconic arena, The Forum, to attend Call Of Duty XP 2016 – to get their hands on *Infinite Warfare*, to cheer on their favourite eSports teams and to catch a glimpse of streamer superstars.

Does it sound like chaos? Well now, that's because it is. But that's the terrifying genius of COD XP 2016, it's the only place in the world where your expectation (and preconceptions) of Call Of Duty players will ever be simultaneously confirmed and contested. Dropping in behind enemy lines, embedded among the chaos, was revealing – at times, even startling. Given the reputation of the infamously hostile player base, would you be surprised to learn that CODXP could sometimes be a hotbed of outlandish behaviour?

Within just an hour of arriving at The Forum we ducked out of the hot California sun and took sanctuary in a bathroom. There we were, stood taking care of business, until a YouTuber sauntered in, camera held aloof, and unzipped his trousers with his free hand. Paralysed in confusion we stood there, motionless and silent. He continued to multitask in a manner we've never quite seen before. "Thanks for watching guys, now don't forget to Like and Subscribe," he says with one hand trained on »

COMBAT RIGS DETAILED

WARFIGHTER

One of the first Rigs Infinity Ward designed, Warfighter, is *Infinite Warfare*'s mid-range soldier. Designed to be the most accessible of the lot, his Trait options favour offensive and defensive objective play.

MERC

Designed for those that love to sprint around with an LMG, dishing out max damager, Merc is a defence focused Rig that'll be best used while defending Hardpoints and Capture points.

PHANTOM

For those that believe camping is a legitimate strategy, Phantom is the Rig for those that enjoy playing stealthily. If you want to avoid detection, sit back from combat and look for those headshots, Phantom is the Rig for you.

SYNAPTIC

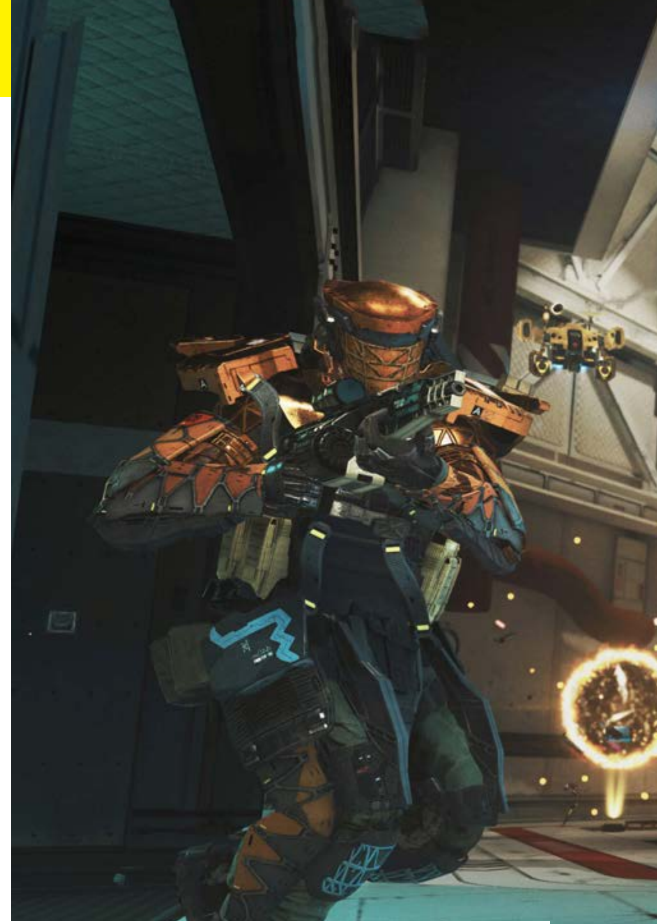
Focused towards closer-quarters combat, Synaptic is brutal up close. This Rig's Payload transforms you into a robot-dog, a murderous robot dog, which lets you bound across the map and insta-killing anything in your way.

FTL

If you love to be in the thick of the action, you may want to give the FTL Rig a try. Designed to get you into combat as quickly as possible, FTL comes equipped with a Trait that lets you warp jump towards enemies.

STRYKER

This Rig is designed for high-level play, particularly if you're heading into games with a team around you. The Stryker Rig is built around support tactics, best used in conjunction with other Rigs to weaken the enemy team.



his camera and the other… do we need to go into detail? The smile never wavered once.

This was day one of COD XP 2016. We still had four more days to go.

FLAMING, IRL

Across the weekend, COD XP would play host to the Call Of Duty Championship finals – a tournament that sees teams competing for a $800,000 top prize – as well as the multiplayer reveals for *Infinite Warfare* and *Modern Warfare Remastered*. Both would be playable at the event, as too would a unique PSVR experience, *Zombies In Spaceland*, and a few fun activities such as Nuketown-themed paintball. Basically, if you're a fan of Call Of Duty, there is no better place to be than COD XP.

Here's the thing though: the Championships didn't get off to a perfect start. The PlayStation Network has gone down, forcing 13 games to be delayed. Players are staring at their phones blankly, a sea of blue-error screens behind them – some were just moments from playing their bracket qualifying games. Others are taking to Twitter to complain as Twitch chats and Reddit pages are set ablaze with anger from fans. All anybody can do is wait and complain.

But then three hours pass and players are becoming incensed. Out in the hot Californian sun, you might come across members of famous North American pro team OpTic Gaming, pacing around and informing a weary-looking manager that the delay "was bullshit." They have a right to complain of course – the later the games were pushed, the less time they would have to rest up ahead of a weekend of ultra-intense best-of-five elimination games.

Inside the arena, however, and tempers were beginning to flare. "Do your fucking job," one pro player, dressed in a red jersey, is shouting at a clearly exhausted event organiser. Here you begin to see a mental picture made real; that of the angst-ridden Call Of Duty player, rude, brash and loud.



■ While there were a lot of great players at CODXP, games™'s MVP has to be Splyce's Benjamin "Bance" Bance, the engineer behind many of the team's best comebacks and plays in their last two games.

She explains, clearly not for the first time, that she isn't a PSN magician, but the person responsible for seating pro players ahead of their games. He stomps off, kicking a chair as he turns, and the organiser can do nothing but shrug it off. "That's Call Of Duty players for you," she remarks to us with a tired smile before disappearing behind a huge stage, one that would host Snoop Dog and Wiz Khalifa in a blaze of smoke and illicit-smelling narcotics come the closing ceremony in a few short days.

LOOKING BEYOND GHOSTS

Distance yourself from the drama and there are great times to be found here. Infinity Ward has revealed the multiplayer component of *Infinite Warfare* to the public, giving us a chance to get hands-on and speak with project director Jordan Hirsh, an *IW* veteran of almost a decade. He's excited to see the reaction and eager to prove that the studio has what it takes to compete with the likes of DICE and Respawn in this year's ultra-competitive market. But it's difficult to talk about *Infinite Warfare* without first bringing up *Ghosts*; it's the one stain on an otherwise pristine resume.

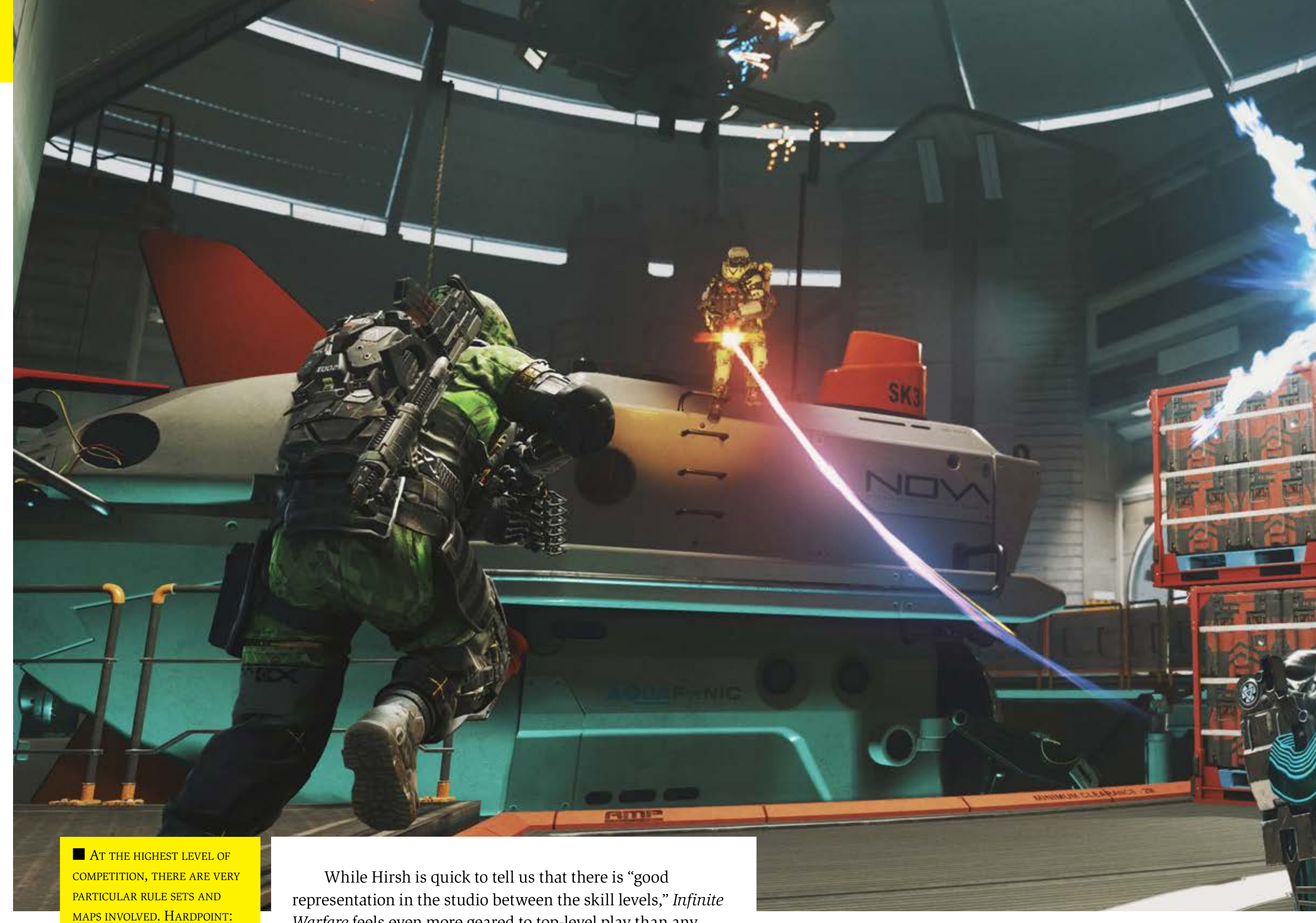
"Obviously there were mistakes, there are always mistakes in every game," says Hirsh on *IW*'s wayward 2013 effort. "We enjoyed the game, but we see the criticism and we acknowledge it." The lessons are obvious: player-visibility wasn't clear and sight lines weren't predictable enough: elements the studio is eager to correct. "By moving forward you learn from the past… we've put a lot of time and effort into making sure that we don't do it again."

Infinite Warfare is already one of the most divisive entries into the long-running Call Of Duty franchise, with many in the community taking issue with the studio's decision to rip the action away from the streets and into the stars. After many hours with *Infinite Warfare*, it's clear that this new direction is affording Infinity Ward the opportunity to imbue its title with a sense of freedom and fluidity, maintaining the core pillars of the franchise while striking out in a new direction. But the number one goal for Infinity Ward is to "make sure the game is fun for everybody," something of a gargantuan task as the divide between skill levels continues to increase.

"When a player is killed in the game they should be able to learn from that experience," says Hirsh, aware that Call Of Duty has become more competitive than ever before. "They need to understand what happened and why it happened. When we balance we have to look at how a casual, a low-skill and a high-skill players are going to play. We have to have opportunities so that a low-skill player can run around and flank somebody and actually get a kill."

> "When a player is killed in the game, they should be able to learn from it"
> - JORDAN HIRSH, INFINITY WARD

Infinite Warfare, at a basic, intrinsic level, plays like a hot blend of *Black Ops III* and *Advanced Warfare* – the Specialists of the former and the movement system of the latter, with Infinity Ward's expertise shining through in the tight game mechanics for good measure. The problem is that both of these games have put a huge focus on making Call Of Duty fit to be an eSport, not to necessarily be a game that can be enjoyed by all. »



■ At the highest level of competition, there are very particular rule sets and maps involved. Hardpoint: Breach and Uplink are played on Evac, Fringe and Stronghold maps. While Search and Destroy is played across Fringe, Redwood, Breach, Hunted, Stronghold and Infection.

While Hirsh is quick to tell us that there is "good representation in the studio between the skill levels," *Infinite Warfare* feels even more geared to top-level play than any game that has proceeded it – perhaps that's because pro players and casters have been involved in development every step of the way. They've been in the studio already, Hirsh explains to us, helping Infinity Ward with the creation of rule-sets, eSport specific equipment changes and balancing ahead of release.

ARE THE COMBAT RIGS COMBAT READY?

At the centre of this balancing act are the all-new Combat Rigs. Built around six distinct styles of play, each of the six Rigs are outfitted with three Payload weapons – designed to boost player effectiveness and lethality in combination with the returning Pick 10 system and three unique persistent perks, called Traits. Players will be able to select one Payload and one Trait in combination to create different play styles, switching easily between them upon death to better respond to developing threats on the battlefield, *Overwatch* style; in theory, at least.

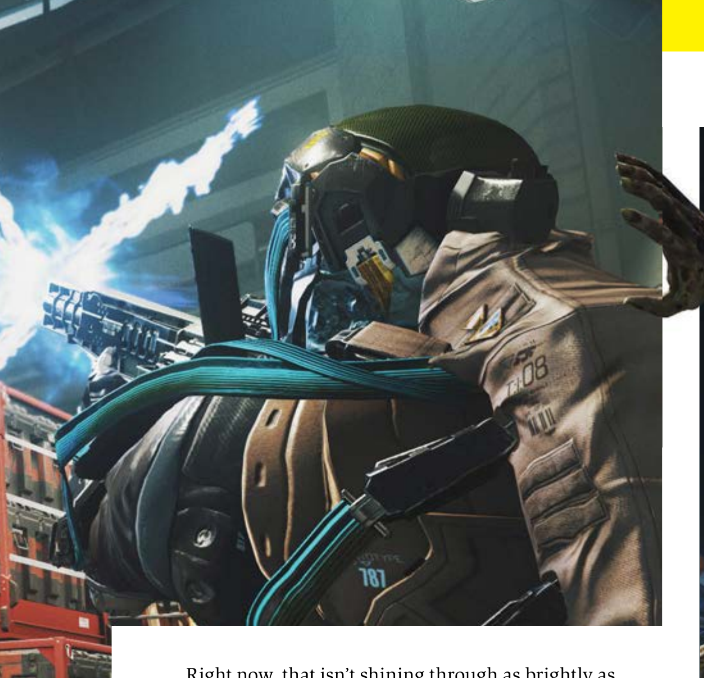
> "There is a ton of content and I think it'll take players quite a while to get through it and digest it all"
> - JORDAN HIRSH, INFINITY WARD

"There is a ton of content and I think it'll take players quite a while to get through it and digest it all, and understand all of the synergies that develop between all of these decisions," says Hirsh, and he isn't wrong. It's difficult to get an accurate read on the meta-game here, though that hasn't stopped us from identifying a handful of problems with the current build. The Combat Rigs have a lot in common with the Specialists of *Black Ops III*, minus the personality. To us, it felt pared back.

"I'm not sure pared back is the right term," says Hirsh. "The way we actually went around developing these is that we started looking at doing a hard class-based system, and that's initially how we determined what play styles we wanted to support with these Rigs. It became apparent to us that there wasn't enough player agency in the Rigs selection when we were forcing that class-based role. So we took a step back and we kept the Trait from that specific class-based role and then expanded them slightly to give players more choice within that prescribed play style."

We can't help but agree, a hard-class based system would be the direct antithesis of modern Call Of Duty, but there's still something not quite right with the Rigs. We get the impression that many may not see the benefit or understand the impact behind the specific Traits, so ineffectual did they seem – ultimately, Pick-10 is still key to unlocking your maximum lethality.

We suggest to Hirsh that perhaps each Rig should come with specific stat advantages and disadvantages, meaning that each of the six Rigs would actually lean towards different play styles – mechanical differences that would actually impact gameplay. This was discussed early on, he explains to us, though the team ultimately rejected the idea. "We initially had base statistic adjustments, but we pulled back from that and put, essentially the essence of whatever those statistical adjustments would be into those Trait decisions," Hirsh continues.



Right now, that isn't shining through as brightly as it should or could. The Rigs and Traits feel like incidental additions around an otherwise sublime shooter – another thing to worry about customising and managing in game, despite the fact that you still can't edit the particulars of your Pick-10 loadout in-game (a decision that's made out of respect to the legacy of Call Of Duty we are told). These feel like additions that will have very little difference to moment-to-moment play outside of the high-level competition, which given the crowd we are surrounded by, seems to be going down well enough.

The map design is tight and vertical; promoting an infectious rhythm between respawns. Gunplay is as great as ever – not that you should expect anything less from *IW*. Momentum is king here too, this is the fastest COD yet and players seem to love it. Surrounded by hundreds of them, we find a side to COD's ravenous fan base we haven't seen before. There's a strong sense of camaraderie here, with groups of strangers routinely breaking out into choruses of cheers between rounds – congratulating other players on kill streaks and crazy plays; high-fiving team mates and offering up words of encouragement. It was wonderful to see, a world removed from the trash talk and player-hostile environment so typically attributed to *COD*'s online component.

TAKING A BREATHER

Back at the hotel, there's a noticeable buzz of excitement and trepidation in the air. Fans of competitive *COD* are shocked to learn that OpTic Gaming, largely considered to be odds-on to win the tournament, have collapsed out of the Loser's Bracket after a thrilling game against Cloud9 – though that game was ultimately marred by reports of racist slurs being thrown from OpTic's fans towards Cloud9's Andres 'Lacefield' Lacefield.

That *COD* toxicity can be seen seeping into games all across the weekend. During one particularly impassioned round of Hardpoint, FaZe Clan's James 'Clayster' Eubanks erupts from his seat, punching his screen and begins screaming, "These guys are trash, these guys are trash" over and over again, directed at the losing Team eLevate. Some in the community find this behaviour intolerable while others seem quick to shrug it off; we think it's deplorable.

Elsewhere, streamers are hyped for *Infinite Warfare* after a hard day of play, recording videos in the lobby – though a group of assembling eGirls outside are proving »



INSPIRATION BEHIND ZOMBIES IN SPACELAND

How Neversoft is bringing its expertise to the table

While the campaign for *Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare* will edge toward seriousness and the multiplayer is a focused test of your ability, Infinity Ward's take on Zombies co-op is going to be purely chaotic. In fact, you've never seen anything like this from Call Of Duty before – it's insane, totally tongue in cheek and it features David Hasslehoff. Trust us, you've never seen or played anything quite like *Infinite Warfare*'s accompanying co-op mode, Zombies In Spacetime.

So how was it created? How do the Infinity Ward developers – led by project director Brian Bright – actually sit down to brainstorm something so ridiculous? Well, it takes "three tabs of acid and a bunch of beer," the veteran ex- Neversoft developer laughs. "No, no it was only a little bit of that. We're lucky to have the flexibility to be as creative as we want to be."

Zombies In Spaceland demonstrates Infinity Ward's affinity for having fun. It's totally separate from anything that has appeared in the Zombies games before, but it's proving to be just as entertaining, a welcomed break from everything else in the package. "We set out to make something totally separate. We aren't making anything in the Treyarch universe – they have crafted that over the last eight years and we know how important it is for gamers to want a break from MP and break from SP," says Bright. "They really want something different, not the same assets in a different setting. In the last game [*Ghosts*] my team did Extinction, but the people want zombies."

And so they have delivered. This is the Zombies that you know, but with some critical upgrades. It's designed to play with the "hedonistic and fun era" and really double down on the idea of this being set in a theme park. Despite the horde of zombies to kill, there are mini-games to be played – "tickets will get you weapons from the future" – and even rides to be enjoyed. If that doesn't take your fancy, then perhaps you'll just be in it for the soundtrack – though believe us when we say that you've never played anything quite like this in Call Of Duty before.

"I was born in the seventies but I grew up in the Eighties. I used to DJ in clubs in the Eighties, so I have a big affinity with the music," teases Bright. "We've got a great soundtrack… I mean, we've put together the soundtracks to the Tony Hawk and Guitar Hero games over the last 20 years and working on this one has been a lot of fun. Hasslehoff is the DJ –he's trying to help you escape from the park – and he will play music across it; It's almost that Tony Hawk vibe of just playing through and having a killer soundtrack and having some fun with it."

INFINITE WARFARE'S CAMPAIGN

Did it deserve the hate?

Jacob Minkoff has just broken our hearts. The design director on *Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare*, has just revealed some devastating news: Riley the dog has not survived the purge following 2013's *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*. "We discussed lots and lots of things for *Infinite Warfare*... but Riley is unfortunately not in this game. There is no cosmonaut space dog."

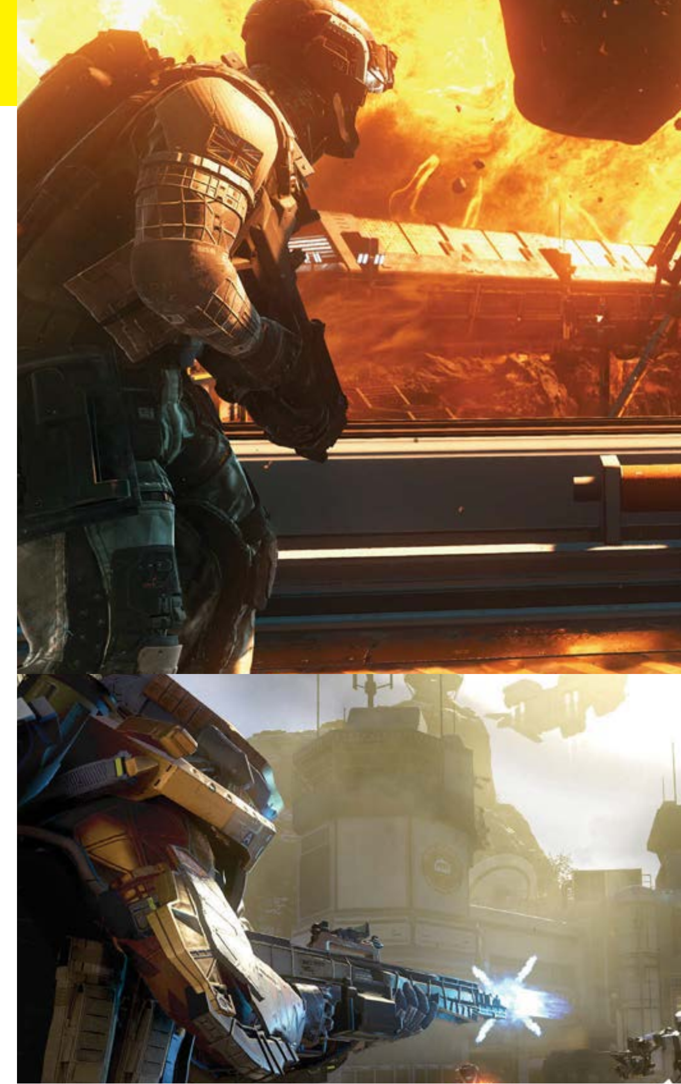
We considered stopping the interview right there and then, but, honestly, Infinity Ward is doing so much right with the campaign of its upcoming shooter that it's difficult to walk away. *Infinite Warfare* isn't your traditional Call Of Duty game – it's taking the combat from the streets to the stars in an impressive fashion. It isn't just flirting with science-fiction, it's jumping into bed with it. *Infinite Warfare* wasn't received fantastically at reveal by certain corners of the community – not that it's keeping the team down.

"Everyone wants new and different but then everyone wants the same. That's true of anything that anybody likes," says Minkoff. "I think we've done a really good job of integrating [the new features] into the game. It will feel like *Call Of Duty* that you know and recognise, but then it'll kick back to you and you'll realise you've been leading the whole time."

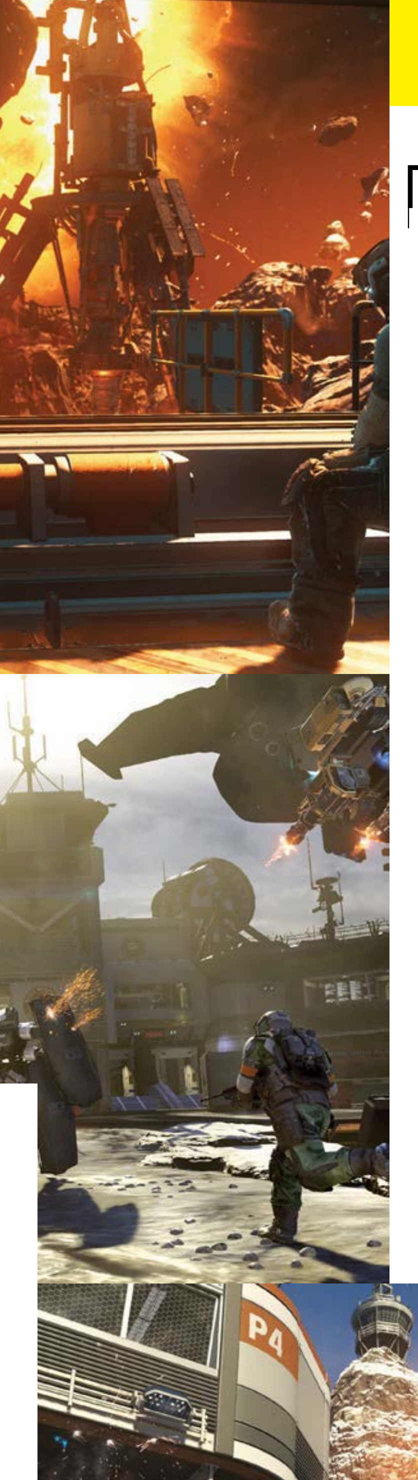
Wait, leading? That's right; in *Infinite Warfare* you're the captain. You're in charge of saving the world. Instead of merely following orders you'll be able to dish them out. You'll be able to take charge of a huge battleship in space, dart between your fully customisable Jackal jet and eventually get back onto the streets for some old-school soldier shooting.

"You are generally the FNG, the new guy; that's really cool, but now we have the opportunity to this really unique thing," says Minkoff. "This story is all about the burden and weight of leadership – of having thousands of soldiers under your command," he says, adding. "Because you're the leader in the moment-to-moment, you're the one pushing forward and leading the NPCs in the actual missions. We put a lot of new mechanics in the game to support this."

The series had to evolve. It had to change and grow, and the game is looking all the better because of it. "We know we needed to evolve, the fans want different things and a lot of us came in as fans. So then it became, what do *we* want out of *Call Of Duty*?" The answer is *Infinite Warfare*, and you'll be able to decide for yourself whether it's what you wanted when it arrives 4 November.



■ Pro players were brought into Infinity Ward early into the development of *Infinite Warfare* to consult on balancing, rule-sets and map creation; Activision continues to put real weight and importance behind eSports.



to be a distraction for some. Oh, the eGirls are gaming streamer's version of superfans who are seemingly desperate to talk to or grab selfies with any streamer they can – be they superstars like Ali-A or the likes of TmarTn. But we only had one thing on our mind: getting to play *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare Remastered.*

VETERANS WANTED

"There's a lot of excitement at Raven," states studio director David Pellas with a beaming smile, and we get the impression that's something of an understatement. Raven Software has spent the better part of five years in the shadows. It has contributed to every Call Of Duty release since *Modern Warfare 3*, though this is the studio's first opportunity to lead a project. And what a fine job it is doing.

In the last nine years, COD has evolved. Moving between *Infinite Warfare* and *Modern Warfare* is like stepping into a time machine. *Infinite Warfare* is complicated and fun all at the same time, but *Modern Warfare Remastered* is a simplified riot.

"When we [took on the project] and created our general rules and our guidelines, the number one design rule was to maintain the integrity of the gameplay," continues Pellas. "We realised quickly that you can't mess with the gameplay, [but] we wanted to make sure that we were making a game that fits into today's world – not a ten-year-old game that we were just going to up the resolution of, nobody wants that. The fans wouldn't appreciate that."

It's difficult to believe that this was the game that changed the first-person shooter for an entire generation; *Modern Warfare Remastered* is a slow, simplistic shooter by today's standards. "This isn't a game where you can wall run or you can double jump," Pellas reminds us. "It's a game based in reality." And that's true, to a certain extent; it does seem more realistic when there aren't any black hole projectors or robotic dogs killing you from around corners indiscriminately.

Raven has been careful to bring updates to the game, across both its single-player and multiplayer components. "There have been thousands of these little instances that we had to really critique," reveals Pellas, noting how hard the studio has worked to faithfully re-create the game whilst still bringing it into the modern era. "We didn't change any gameplay, but we changed the visuals of it," he says, noting that while the animations may have changed for mantling over cover or pulling a weapon into ADS, "the timing is exactly the same," – ultimately that's all that matters.

> "The number one design rule was to maintain the integrity of the gameplay"
> - DAVID PELLAS, RAVEN SOFTWARE

Truth be told, it's quite an impressive conversion. It's a return to a world where muscle memory is far more important than any laser-quick reactions or ability to masterfully wield a jump pack. If you can remember the identifying sound of a Martyrdom Perk activating, to jump into prone at the first sight of a Flash bang, and how to properly assault Grandma's House – then you'll blossom and thrive.

It was interesting to see, actually, the difference in skill levels between players here at COD XP. For the most part, the guys that were taking people to school on *Infinite Warfare* were the ones struggling once when we dipped nine years into the past. Map knowledge is key to victory, as to is managing the small selection of weapon choices and tactical equipment. Positioning is oh so important to *Modern Warfare*, and we expect to see quite the divide between players come November.

WE DO NOT BELONG

There's quite a change in atmosphere by the time the final day of COD XP arrives. While the other days had a tendency to be quite relaxed, now the crowd is locked down in their seats. One fan is proudly holding a banner above his head that reads: "#CollegeOrCODXP – My mum doesn't know I'm here, please don't film me," this final day is chaos.

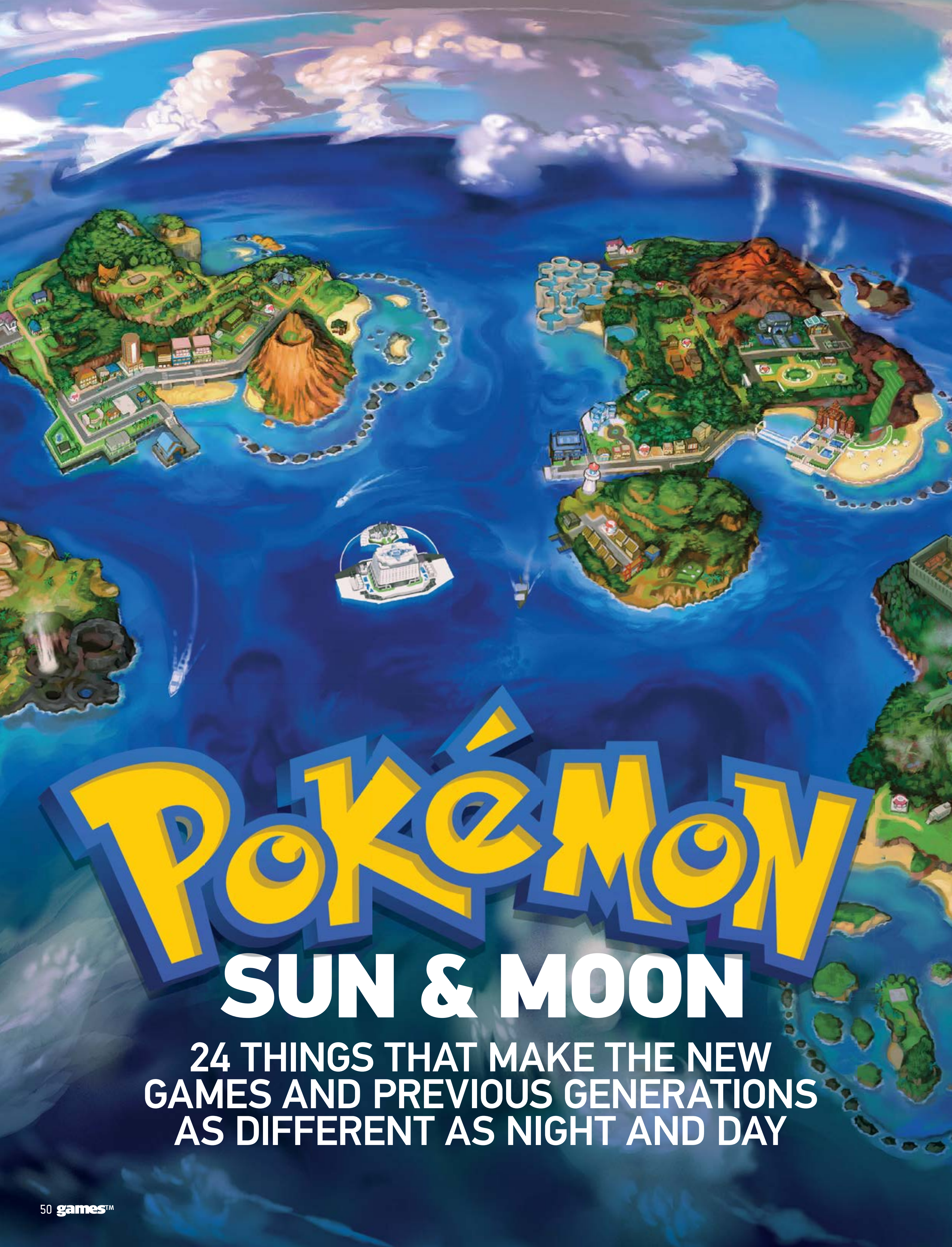
Splyce has done the impossible, rising up from the Loser Bracket – dishing out convincing wins against FAB Games and eLevate – to reach the grand final versus Team EnVyUs. The North American fans are not happy; Europe's ability to dent the competitive scene is seen as a bit of a joke and Splyce making it this far has caused a bit of commotion – it has never been done before in the history of competitive Call Of Duty.

Killstreaks are met with screams, game winning plays with standing ovations. Whenever the Tempest Payload weapon was deployed, people would go freaking *wild*. Every move matters here, even the tiniest mistake could be worth over $600,000 to the four. The positioning is fast and reactional, it's a different level of play and it's thrilling to watch.

In spite of a valiant effort, Splyce are beaten to the grand prize by EnVyUs, the applause is exhaustive. If you've never understood the appeal of eSports or professional gaming you should get down to a major event – whether it's sponsored by Gfinity or ESL – and see what it's like for yourself. In a moment, in *that* moment, it all makes sense.

"Winning this event, in front of this crowd is a dream come true," said Jordan 'JKAP' Kaplan, the captain of victorious Team EnVyUs. "The energy, the tension, and the competition were all amazing. This is a moment that I will remember for the rest of my life." We think it might just be one we remember too.

■ *Infinite Warfare* will introduce weapon crafting for the first time. This will allow players the opportunity to focus wholeheartedly on obtaining a single weapon of choice, but you'll also be able to get powerful Prototype weapons that come in various rarities.



POKÉMON SUN & MOON

24 THINGS THAT MAKE THE NEW GAMES AND PREVIOUS GENERATIONS AS DIFFERENT AS NIGHT AND DAY

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

1 Welcome to Alola, the most varied and interesting Pokémon region yet

Setting can make or break a Pokémon adventure and while Alola – based, in case you hadn't worked it out, on Hawaii – might have those who moaned about *Ruby/Sapphire*'s wetness worried, we're a little more optimistic. It's set across four large islands, each a self-contained mini-region of sorts and with amazing variety not only on a per-island basis but on a global scale. Most of what we've seen so far comes from the first island, Melemele, which looks to be the most 'traditional', while the others (which are currently nameless) can be seen from the map artwork to be more themed and, interestingly, more vertical – one is built around a volcanic formation, another around a towering mountain with a frigid peak and the last a seemingly less populated rocky desert area. There will be several smaller islands as well, so expect these to house post-game secrets.

OFF THE GRID

2 Digital movement has finally been completely removed

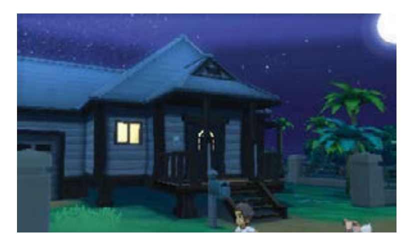
The last few games have done a good job of slowly moving from the grid-based navigation system of old to full freedom of movement, but snapping back to rigid placement in certain buildings felt a little jarring. Here, we've seen nothing to suggest that the grid will exist at all – in fact, most of the locations shown off so far seem built around that free movement and given how the camera likes to move around to show off the beautiful vistas that the more three-dimensional world allows, a grid for movement simply wouldn't work. It's something that has been part of the game since the very beginning, so *Sun* and *Moon* will be the first games to fully break free of the shackles of this dated mechanic.

DAY AND NIGHT

3 There's a 12-hour time difference between the *Sun* and *Moon* versions

Setting the two games 12 hours apart initially seems like an odd decision, but it's one that actually makes a good deal of sense on closer inspection. On top of adding a tangible difference to the long-running two-game model which has lost much of its impact and meaning in this more connected age, it's also a great feature for those who like to (or who can only) play at different times of day. Busy players and those who work long hours seldom get to see the sun in games tied to real-world time (which it seems *Sun* will be), so *Moon*'s offset time will allow a bright and colourful world to be explored when it's actually dark outside, with night relegated to those times you'll likely have less time to play on a busy work schedule. Finally, an actual reason to buy one version or the other aside from Pokémon exclusivity.





BE THE VERY BEST



4 Expect even more depth and variety to trainer customisation

One aspect of the game that has always been lacking (in the core games, at least – the online *TCG* gets it right) is customisation of your trainer. It's not something that was important or really possible or worthwhile in the early games but today, it's important for the games to be both inclusive and personal. *Sun* and *Moon* look to have the best system in place to tick these boxes, with what looks to be a fairly simple initial Trainer creation process bolstered by stores in the game's towns and cities that will let you further edit your appearance. If *X* and *Y* are anything to go by, there'll probably be even more of this going on in the postgame, effectively giving you a way of displaying and recognizing progress based purely on character style.

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

5 Enjoy at-a-glance advice on stat changes and move effectiveness

With more Pokémon type combinations than ever before, it's getting harder and harder for even expert trainers to keep on top of which attacks will prove most effective on which defending Pokémon. To combat this, GameFreak has done away with the need to commit the matchup chart to memory and included a dialogue box in the battle UI that clearly states which attacks will be effective and which won't. In addition, stat changes can be tracked though a new menu – a handy feature when missing or forgetting about a big buff like Swords Dance or Dragon Dance can be costly. It's only a small detail but it's amazing how quickly little quality of life improvements like this can stack up – just look at *Monster Hunter Generations* to see how myriad iterative improvements can improve a familiar experience more than you might think.

MIXING IN UP

6 Unique new type combinations come into play

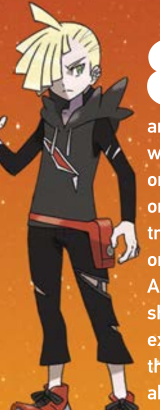
There are still plenty of unique typings that haven't been used, and *Sun* and *Moon* will be ticking a few of those off. Drampa gets the curious Normal/Dragon typing, although Ghost and Grass immunity (the latter from its Sap Sipper Ability) along with Dragon's plentiful resistances should give it plenty of opportunities to switch in. Cutiefly gets Bug/Fairy, a curious typing with little crossover which means a lot of weaknesses but a lot of resistances too (including double Fighting resistance and Dragon immunity). Salandit's Poison/Fire combo is also new, as is Mimikyu's Ghost/Fairy type (which grants it the maximum of three natural immunities), while a lot of new Pokémon forms will also have previously unseen combinations, such as Alolan Sandslash's horrible Ice/Steel combo and Alolan Raichu's odd but potentially potent fusion of Electric and Psychic.

MOST HAUNTED

7 There's a Ghost type in your Pokédex, but apparently that's a good thing

Rotom is a quirky Pokémon that never really felt like it lived up to its full potential – its various forms, each related to it haunting a different household appliance, were largely redundant since its Wash form's excellent defensive Water/Ghost typing made it pretty much the only viable option. Now, however, Rotom will be more like a companion, living in your Pokédex and able to offer advice or direction when needed, potentially letting Rotom nudge you in the right direction when you wander off course rather than having arbitrary barriers to progress. It's unclear whether Rotom will count towards your Pokédex or be able to be used in its other forms for battle, although it seems unlikely as trading it away or releasing it would leave you without this augmented Pokédex.

ONLY IN ALOLA



8 Certain Pokémon will take on new forms and types in the new world, meaning that the original versions may only be obtainable via trading or transferring, or potentially in a non-Alola postgame setting, should such a thing exist. Here are a few of the new forms we know about so far.



EXEGGUTOR

Changing from a stumpy palm tree design to a long-necked tropical variant isn't the only change for this Grass/Psychic oddball – the Alolan form also loses its Psychic side in exchange for (bizarrely) Dragon typing, making it the first natural Grass/Dragon type with only Mega Sceptile having had this combo before.



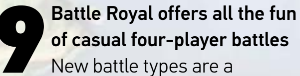
RATTATA/RATICATE

New forms for early game Pokémon such as Rattata seem like a waste of time, especially here. Picking up an additional Fighting weakness from its Dark type means unless its stats have been altered considerably, Faticate (as it has become known) won't even be able to look at a Fighting Pokémon without fainting.

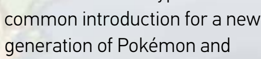


VULPIX/NINETALES

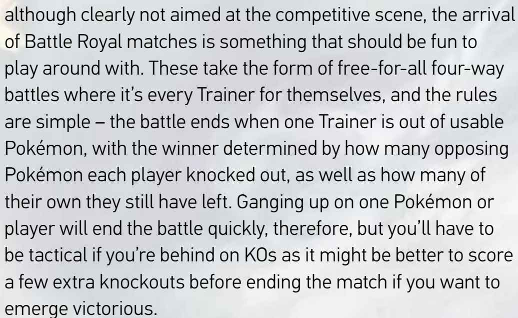
Its stats and move pool have never made it especially competitive, although its new Ice/Fairy combo should make Alolan Ninetales one of the best counters to Dragon types in the game. One of the best Alolan forms on paper – let's hope the new Ninetales has the stats to back this new potential up.



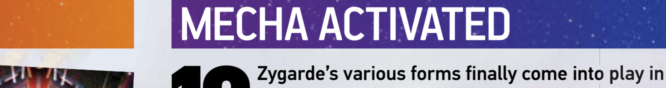
FATAL FOUR-WAY



9 Battle Royal offers all the fun of casual four-player battles



New battle types are a common introduction for a new generation of Pokémon and although clearly not aimed at the competitive scene, the arrival of Battle Royal matches is something that should be fun to play around with. These take the form of free-for-all four-way battles where it's every Trainer for themselves, and the rules are simple – the battle ends when one Trainer is out of usable Pokémon, with the winner determined by how many opposing Pokémon each player knocked out, as well as how many of their own they still have left. Ganging up on one Pokémon or player will end the battle quickly, therefore, but you'll have to be tactical if you're behind on KOs as it might be better to score a few extra knockouts before ending the match if you want to emerge victorious.



MECHA ACTIVATED

10 Zygarde's various forms finally come into play in an intriguing side quest

While legendary Pokémon Zygarde may have first appeared in *X* and *Y*, there's a lot more to the black-and-green serpent than meets the eye. Various other forms have been circulating for a while, introduced in the anime and *TCG* already but not available in the mainline games and originally suspected to be added via a third *Z* version of the sixth generation games. Instead, it appears the mysteries surrounding Zygarde and its various incarnations will instead feature as a side-plot in *Sun* and *Moon* – we've seen a pair of Trainers and new items related to collecting Zygarde Cells in order to unlock the full potential of the Dragon/Ground oddity. As well as the embryonic Cell and Core forms, there's the hound-like 10% Forme, the traditional look of Zygarde rebranded to be its 50% Forme and a towering mech design which is its 100% Forme.



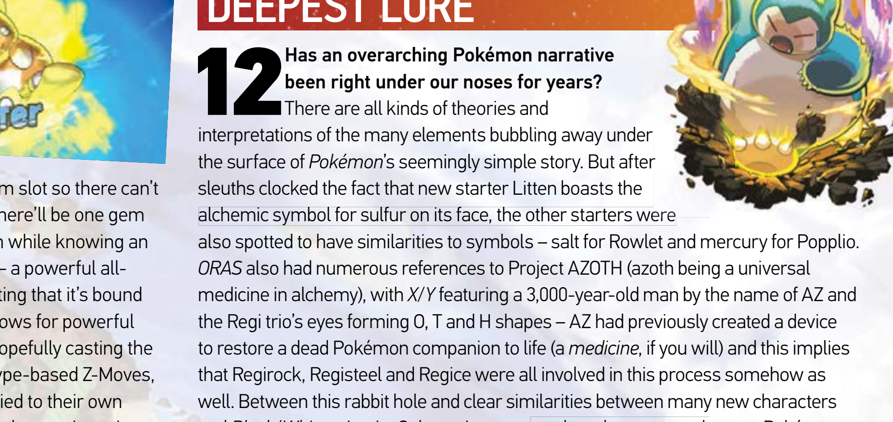
LIMIT BREAK



11 **Z-Moves offer powerful new attacks that must be used strategically**

It's all gone quiet on the Mega Evolution front, most likely because the new Z-Move mechanic will also make use of the held item slot so there can't be any crossover between the two. On its most basic level, there'll be one gem for each of the 18 types and having a Pokémon hold the gem while knowing an attack of the same type will allow use of that type's Z-Move – a powerful all-out assault that can only be used once per battle. It's interesting that it's bound to attack type rather than species type, as this potentially allows for powerful coverage moves where previously no such option existed, hopefully casting the competitive net that much wider. In addition to the generic type-based Z-Moves, certain Pokémon will have their own unique Z-Move that is tied to their own specific gem, as seen with the Snorlium Z crystal letting Snorlax use its unique Pulverizing Pancake attack.

DEEPEST LORE



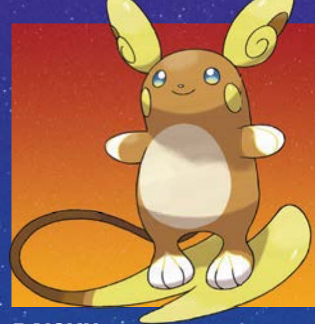
12 **Has an overarching Pokémon narrative been right under our noses for years?**

There are all kinds of theories and interpretations of the many elements bubbling away under the surface of *Pokémon*'s seemingly simple story. But after sleuths clocked the fact that new starter Litten boasts the alchemic symbol for sulfur on its face, the other starters were also spotted to have similarities to symbols – salt for Rowlet and mercury for Popplio. *ORAS* also had numerous references to Project AZOTH (azoth being a universal medicine in alchemy), with *X/Y* featuring a 3,000-year-old man by the name of AZ and the Regi trio's eyes forming O, T and H shapes – AZ had previously created a device to restore a dead Pokémon companion to life (a *medicine*, if you will) and this implies that Regirock, Registeel and Regice were all involved in this process somehow as well. Between this rabbit hole and clear similarities between many new characters and *Black/White* scientist Colress, it seems as though pretty much every Pokémon generation so far is connected as part of something much bigger…



MEOWTH

Sassy Meowth is amazing, if not entirely necessary – there's already a pure Dark cat type in Purrloin, although this change might at least allow an Alolan Persian form (yet to be revealed) to finally get a moment in the spotlight. It naturally learns almost as many Dark attacks as Normal ones anyway…



RAICHU

Light Ball Pikachu has long been a stronger attacker than its evolved form, but Alolan Raichu looks to break out of Pika's shadow by adopting a secondary Psychic type. With its speed doubled while terrain is electrocuted and its own unique Z-Move in Stoked Sparksurfer, it could finally be Raichu's time.



MAROWAK

Pokémon's most tragic creature gets a new evolution here, although moving from pure Ground typing to a Fire/Ghost combo shared only with the Chandelure line is an unexpected twist. Marowak has always been mid-tier at best, so perhaps this is a change for the better, if a slightly disturbing one.



SANDSHREW/SANDSLASH

The bad news just keeps on coming for these poor little guys – not only are they pretty weak in the mainline games and awful in *Pokémon Go*, but their new Ice/Steel typing is one of the worst defensively in the entire meta. Fighting and Fire moves will wreck it and, like Ninetales, it's also weak to its former type.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

13 **New Abilities could completely change the competitive meta-game**

Abilities come in many flavours, with the best of them making even weaker Pokémon competitively viable (hello, Trickster Klefki) and poor Abilities capable of bumping otherwise strong battlers way down the pecking order. The new Abilities shown off so far already run that full gamut, but there's a really interesting degree of potential to many. Comfey's Triage confers priority to healing moves, making it an awesome healer for double battles; Bewear's Fluffy halves the damage of all incoming physical attacks at the cost of also giving it Fire weakness; Mimikyu's Disguise gives it a one-off Substitute effect, while Minior's Shields Down makes it bulky and immune to status effects until its HP reaches 50 per cent, which triggers a form change and switch from defensive orientation to offensive.



DO YOU EVEN LIFT?

14 **The classic Gym system is abolished in favour of a fresh structure**

In perhaps the most radical shake-up to a structure that has gone largely unchanged in 20 years: *Sun* and *Moon* will do away with Gyms and badges. The replacement for this? Island Challenge Trials, a mission system of sorts that appears to be far more interesting than simply beating Trainers to progress. Trials will take many forms, generally culminating in battles against the Trial Captains to eventually secure acceptance into the Grand Trial – a battle against the Kahuna of the respective island. Trial Captains, like Gym Leaders, specialize in different types of Pokémon, with the four revealed so far experts in Electric, Water, Grass and Fire. What all this means for the endgame is unclear, although there's bound to be a Pokémon League equivalent – one rumour doing the rounds is that you could be on a quest to assemble the region's league and Elite Four yourself, which would be another cool twist on the standard formula.



GET CONNECTED

15 ***Sun* and *Moon* could form links between more generations than ever**

Allowing Trainers to bring their Pokémon collections with them from previous generations is a staple of the series and has been since the beginning, but these new games will have more ways to do that than ever before. While hopefully the process will be time-gated to prevent trivialising the game with a pre-prepared team, you'll be able to connect with *Pokémon Bank*, *X*, *Y*, *Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire*, and it doesn't stop there – it's been suggested that Pokémon from the Virtual Console releases of *Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow* could also be transferred over via Bank (which would be an easy way to snag non-Alolan forms) and even that there could be some connectivity between these games and *Pokémon Go*. We've no idea how that would work, but we'll take all the connections we can get.

BOSS RUSH

16 **Totem Pokémon appear to bring true boss battles to the series**

Showdowns with powerful Pokémon have always followed the exact same pattern as any other encounter in previous games, but that's all set to change once you've proven yourself in one of the Island Trials. Each will apparently culminate in a battle against a Totem Pokémon – a powerful boss that serves as the equivalent to a Gym Leader battle. Here, though, the playing field is no longer level. As well as immediate stat buffs that kick in at the start of the fight, Totem Pokémon are also capable of calling in backup and even though we've only seen them recruit weaker versions of their own evolution line so far, it's safe to assume that there will be battles in the main game where such support is a little more daunting. Still, it's a mechanic that should make these important battles feel more interesting and dynamic, which can only be a good thing.

LOOK ALIVE

17 **New locations are teeming with life, with wild creatures everywhere**

Aside from those you find in long grass and see in battles, it's rare to see Pokémon out and about in the world in earlier games. More recently, we've seen an improvement in this respect but still not to the same level depicted by the manga or anime, where wild Pokémon live in and around towns and cities just like urban animals do in the real world. *Sun* and *Moon* appear to be as close as the games have come to showing just how closely people and Pokémon actually live together, with Flying types roosting on rooftops, wild critters scurrying around, humanoid Pokémon mingling and helping at ground level and just lots more going on, helping Alola feel like the most believable *Pokémon* setting to date.



POKÉMON SNAP 2

18 **Photography mini-game lets you take pictures of wild Pokémon**

Safari spin-off *Pokémon Snap* is secretly one of the greatest games in the series and fans have been calling out for a sequel for years – the Wii U gamepad seemed like the perfect tool to create such a thing but instead, it looks like those with an a keen interest in Pokémon photography will instead have to make do with this additional side-mode in *Sun*/*Moon*. At certain spots, you'll be able to observe and snap wild Pokémon, the resulting photos then graded and shared (possibly online, although that's not entirely clear at this time). More *Snap* is fine with us, provided there are plenty of opportunities to shoot for the perfect picture.



BIGGER POCKETS

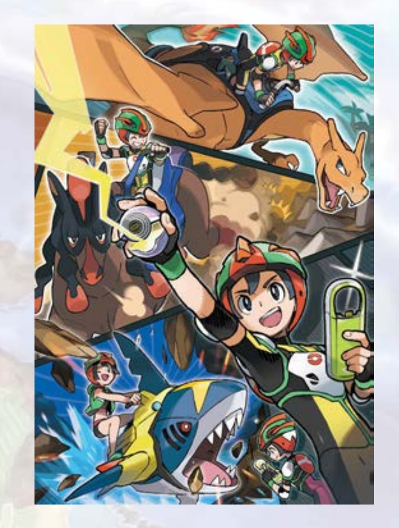
19 **Ultra Beasts are new monsters that aren't classified as Pokémon**

Their role in the games has yet to be confirmed, but the newly revealed Ultra Beasts – each categorised alphanumerically as UB-01, UB-02 and so on rather than via a Pokédex number – look to be another push towards making important battles actually *feel* important. The jellyfish-like UB-01 appears to feature in both games, while there's a split between the two versions of the game for UB-02 – *Sun* players with face off against muscly mosquito thing UB-02 Absorption while *Moon* players instead face UB-02 Beauty. Similarities have been noted between the Ultra Beasts and members of the supporting cast, too – UB-01 closely resembles the professor's assistant Lillie, while the other two share features with Team Skull's Gladion and Aether Foundation's Lusamine, so it could be that they're related to these characters in some meaningful way.

ACHIEVE PERFECTION

20 Base stats can be modified for the first time in the franchise

The science that goes on under the hood of the *Pokémon* games is ludicrously deep, although the games have been gradually growing more transparent with some of the mechanics that were once the exclusive domain of the hardcore. Things like Individual Values (IVs for short, which you may only recently have discovered thanks to *Pokémon Go*'s use of a similar system) once required careful breeding or wild luck in order to create optimal battle partners – Pokémon abilities are graded between 0 and 31 in each stat when caught or hatched, with stats altered by this value. If you don't want to worry about breeding, though, GameFreak has you covered this time out. Hyper Training will allow you, at the cost of a new rare item, to boost all IVs of a Pokémon to the maximum of 31, smashing down yet another barrier to competitive play for those with less time or knowledge of the underlying systems at work in the games.



BARCODE BATTLER

21 Add entries to your Pokédex by scanning QR codes

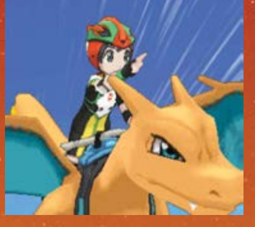
You'll be able to work on your Pokédex in a number of ways, primarily the usual process of seeing new creatures in the wild or in battle to register them before heading out to find and evolve them for yourself. If there's something that continues to elude you, however, there might still be a way to track it down. If a friend has caught something you need, they can show you its QR code to also unlock it in your own 'dex, although this is the kind of thing that is going to prove hard to police and we'd expect to see QR codes for just about every Pokémon hit the web in a matter of hours after launch, unless these can be personalised in some way to prevent mass distribution.

ENJOY THE RIDE

22 Saddle up for what looks to be a replacement to the HM system

Any veteran Trainer will know the pain of having to lug around Pokémon purely because they know required moves like Strength, Surf, Rock Smash or any of the other utility attacks used in exploration. The series was already making bold strides towards the removal of this limiting anachronism (Soaring on Latios/Latias on *ORAS* replaced Fly and severely reduced the need for Surf) but now, it looks as though riding Pokémon may serve as a full replacement.





AIR

Hop onto a Flying type and you'll be able to take to the skies in what will likely be this game's Soar analogue. Hopefully that means there'll be something similar to Mirage Spots from *ORAS* as a reason to keep exploring, although it should be useful even if not.



LAND

Gogoat was introduced in *X* and *Y* with the express purpose of being ridden, while other land-hugging Pokémon like Rhyhorn have also played that role. Here, it might provide the same use as Rock Smash, Strength, Rock Climb, Cut or other hazard clearance moves, depending on the Pokémon.



SEA

A Surf equivalent is the most obvious functionality that could be provided by rideable Water Pokémon, although it could go deeper (if you'll excuse the terrible pun) and let us explore the underwater realm as was possible in some of the earlier games via the Dive HM.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

23 Organise tournaments and make people play by your rules

Each generation of *Pokémon* game has introduced new roles for players to play, from that of a breeder looking to raise the perfect Pokémon or a contest star who cares more about their Pokémon's performance than battle success, to a collector of all rare sub-species and variants of specific Pokémon or a master battler who goes on lengthy winning streaks at the Battle Frontier. Now, there's yet another option and if you've ever fancied yourself as a tournament organiser, this will be your chance to give it a crack. Online competitions can be set up by anyone, with entrants either allowed to sign up freely or via invitation to compete on terms that you decide. We'll have to wait and see how deep this system goes, but it'd be great if you could offer prizes such as rare Pokémon or items to really get people ready to compete.



THE GO EFFECT



24 Thanks to the mobile game, *Pokémon* is as big as it's ever been

You might have noticed a little something called *Pokémon Go* has been causing ripples (read: bloody great waves) on the mobile scene lately and as a result, Pokémon is practically as popular as it was when the boom first happened. As such, the stage is set for the next game in the series to reap the benefits – prices have soared on older games and demand is high, which should mean *Sun* and *Moon* do really quite well. The truth is that from everything we've seen, the games deserve the success that seems assured, too – it's the most radical shake-up of the series' core mechanics since it first hit the shelves two decades ago and a bold reinvention of a franchise that is provably able to turn in silly numbers on iteration and brand power alone.



Does Gaming have a Gambling Problem?

With eSport becoming a multi-million dollar business and rare in-game items trading for real money, games™ investigates the issue of legitamate and rule-breaking betting for the industry.

Gambling can be a dangerous two-way street. The adrenaline rush of achieving victory – feeding that dopamine high as more money materialises before your weary fingertips – can be a feeling unlike any other. But while it can be fun in bursts, it isn't often smart. Everything can be ripped away from you in an instant, thousands lost in the turn of a wheel, the play of a hand, and often when you least it expect it – such is the pitfall of engaging in a game of chance. Lives can fall apart and there's often nobody there to pick up the pieces.

That's why there is protection in place to safeguard the masses from the allure and obvious pitfalls of gambling. Whether it's in traditional betting circles or even lotteries and sweepstakes, they are industries that are heavily regulated and licensed; watched over by government officials in an effort to safeguard you from the demons of addiction.

But what happens when those safeguards fail? When even the simplest protection barriers aren't in place, or perhaps even suitable, to protect against the emerging threats of the 21st Century? When enterprising people with smart ideas and bad intentions are free to take advantage of anybody that they can – those looking to have a good time without the good sense to stop; the minors with a parent's credit card, unaware of the results of their actions.

You get something that looks like the fiasco that emerged in the summer of 2016, where the subject of gambling in gaming was dragged out from the shadows and its illicit nature was pushed into the spotlight for all to see. Many gamers have lost thousands of dollars, class-action lawsuits are being drawn up in the United States and court trials are beginning in the UK. The question of whether gaming has a gambling problem is no longer a trivial matter; people are going to court and more than reputations are now at stake.

Gambling in gaming presents something of a new challenge for, well, just about everybody involved, be they watchdogs, the players, eSports organisers or even parents. The problem that currently exists, however, is that there are two sides to this coin, and one is vastly more popular – and dangerous – than the other.





"The question of whether gaming has a gambling problem is no longer a trivial matter; people are going to court and more than reputations are now at stake"



It has been reported that legitimate cash gambling on eSports games is worth an estimated $594 million worldwide in 2016. This kind of gambling – and we're talking properly licensed and regulated gambling, undertaken by adults – is accepted and legal, of course; at least here in the United Kingdom. Mainstream bookmakers are even involved in the process to improve legitimacy.

The likes of SkySports, BetWay, Bet365 and Ladbrokes will all let you put money down on your favourite *CS:GO*, *DOTA2*, *Call Of Duty* and *League Of Legends* pro teams and bet on the top level of eSports, just like in any other sport. William Hill has even reported that it has taken 14,000 bets on eSports games so far this year, and that figure is expected to quadruple in the next 12 months.

Here's the problem: legitimate gambling may be worth $594 million, but some analysts believe that skin gambling has mutated into a $7.4 billion dollar industry – an audience, many fear, is largely comprised of minors attracted to gambling by third-party providers.

"I liked the feeling of winning, I just don't like losing. If I wanted to keep playing I'd just take my dad's credit card and start buying skins online," said James* from the South Coast of England, and it may surprise you to learn that it was quite a common response from many of the players we spoke with (many of whom were male and often under the age of 18). Note the use of "playing" instead of "betting" – many don't even understand that what they're doing constitutes as gambling. It is perhaps this misconception that has allowed illegal gambling to thrive in videogames such as *Counter-Strike*, *DOTA2* and *FIFA 16*, with parents and regulators none the wiser.

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive – a game that still boasts 10 million players every month, according to Valve – has an official system in which players can obtain purely cosmetic skins for their weapons. A way to show off in-game, if you will. Skins are found in random loot drops called Cases, which you obtain as you play the game.

Cases can only be opened with keys that need to be purchased from the in-game store for as little as $2.49, or they can be acquired – through direct purchase or trade – from the official Steam Community Market. An alternative method of acquiring specific skins directly is to buy or trade for them with your credit on Steam, *or* you can cut Steam out of the process entirely and take your business to a third-party site where real cash is involved.

It is impossible to withdraw money from your Steam Wallet – that's why a lot of the *CS:GO* transactions take place outside of the Community Market. Valve's Steam API allowed for third-party services to sync up with a player's Steam account, allowing the trade and purchase of skins without any publisher regulation or price benchmarks. Websites such as CSGOShop and OPSkins, while not directly gambling sites, allow customers to cash out funds they received for selling skins through online services such as PayPal.

You see, these skins carry a rarity, and some can be worth in excess of $1,000 – that's the price of bragging rights these days. The skins each have a monetary value, and that has led to a culture of gambling to emerge around what should be a harmless system.

This could be done on Sportsbook sites, ones that follow every level of competitive *Counter-Strike* and let you place skins on your favourite teams; or even casino-style games such as *Jackpot*, *Roulette* and *Coin Flip* where players bet their lucrative cosmetics in lottery-style games of chance, where the more skins (therefore money) that you put into the pot, the higher your chance of winning becomes. If it sounds ridiculous and more than a little shady, that's because it is – but it's also grossly popular. It has even been argued by some analysts that this underground gambling culture has boosted viewership of professional matches and specific streamers.

A number of big streamers on Twitch and YouTube have been outed as owning some of the most popular skin gambling websites. Failing to disclose these businesses is in breach of FTC regulations, though promoting gambling to minors is what they should really be worried about.

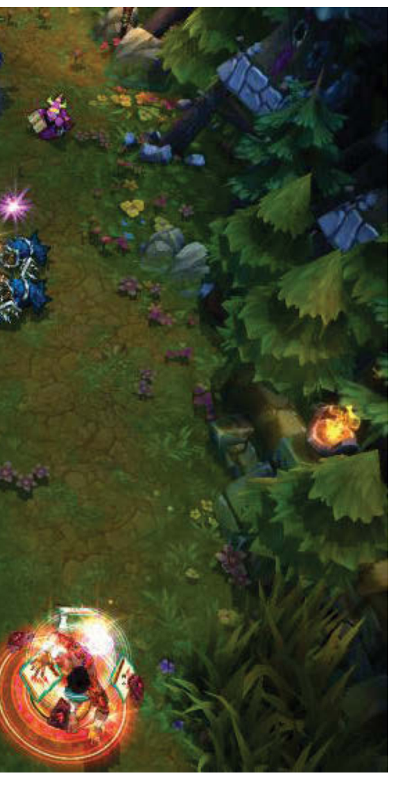
The reason this is so controversial is that, ultimately, third-party sites such as CSGO Lotto, CSGO Shuffle, DOTA2 Lounge and FUT Galaxy operate without regulation or the appropriate gambling licenses. They are not, however, considered gambling sites under most current laws in the US and that has allowed minors and players in countries (like the United States) to gamble online where traditionally it would be illegal. That's the legal grey area that we are dealing with here. "The websites I used didn't ask for my age and it didn't really feel like I was losing real money," Juan from New York tells us. "I know the skins are valuable, but I didn't really realise what I was doing at the time."

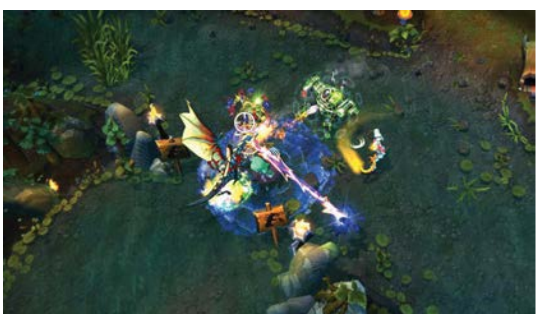
Like many others, the *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* and *FIFA* players we spoke to first developed an interest in betting skins by watching their favourite YouTube creators and Twitch streamers; those promoting the opportunity to win big from betting something as harmless as a weapon skin

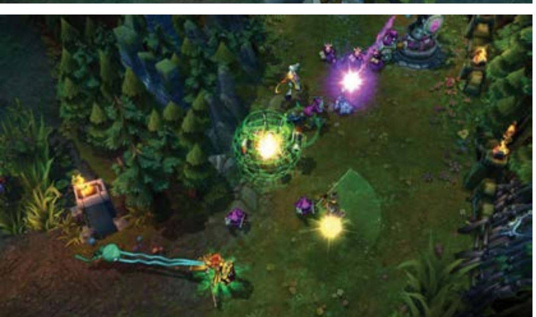


"The websites I used didn't ask for my age and it didn't really feel like I was losing real money"

*Some names have been changed to protect the identity of respondents









for a P90 or the opportunity to acquire more coins for FIFA Ultimate Team.

"I started out by betting on pro games," said Steve from Los Angeles, a college student. "I couldn't bet on my favourite teams from here in the US with my actual money (it was illegal) but I wanted to find a way to make the games more interesting; that's when I turned to skins. But after seeing guys like PhantomL0rd and TmarTn making so much money online, I started putting everything I had into Jackpot sites."

> "IT HAS BEEN REVEALED THAT MANY OF THE CONTENT CREATORS PROMOTING THESE GAMBLING WEBSITES WERE ACTUALLY THE OWNERS"

Sadly, Steve's story isn't an uncommon one. Neither is the revelation that he lost over $1,000 in a single bet. "I just had to make that money back," he said, explaining that from there he had to desperately double down on betting. "I had to pay for my classes." What stings for many of these young gamblers isn't that they lost so much money betting on something as innocuous as skins, but that it has been revealed that some of the content creators promoting these gambling websites were actually the owners.

In some cases, evidence has been produced that these streamers weren't only concealing their involvement in these businesses (in breach of FTC regulations). Not only were they advertising the allure of gambling out to their millions of subscribers (many of which are minors), but skewing the odds in their favour to generate more exciting content. Many of the videos showing gambling in gaming are actually rigged; the few have made a lot of profit, while the majority are made to look like gullible idiots.

Since these revelations, major movements have begun. Twitch, which boasts 100 million unique visitors a month, has banned all streaming of online *CS:GO* gambling, even going as far as to ban its seventh biggest streamer – James 'PhantomL0rd' Vega – after he was accused of rigging rolls on CSGO Shuffle. Evidence suggests he owns the site, a point he failed to disclose in front of his 1.3 million followers. PhantomL0rd was also part of the biggest *CS:GO* jackpot in history, thought to be valued at over $100,000, though its



■ While *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* has received the biggest spotlight over illegal gambling, it also has a huge presence in games such as *DOTA2*, *FIFA* and *League Of Legends*.



How safe is eSports from gambling?

Is competitive gaming a match-fixing risk?

When Ian Smith conducted a threat assessment of the eSports industry, as part of his appointment as the commissioner of the eSports Integrity Coalition [ESIC], he discovered a number of credible threats to the integrity and stability of the industry. Chief among them, however, was the risk of match fixing – the act of deliberately losing a match in order to profit from betting fraud, either directly or indirectly.

"We could be looking at legitimate betting markets of around $23 billion by 2020, which would be a combined market of at least $250 billion once you factor in the grey and black market gambling. That's a level at which the betting becomes very interesting to the sort of people that you really don't want interested in your sport or activity."

Smith has over 20 years experience in the sporting world across a variety of disciplines. If he has concerns, it's well worth hearing him out. "It became clear that even if they [these figures] are half right – and I think they are under-estimated – we are going to get a flood of activity from serious and experienced match-fixing cartels, gambling syndicates and punters looking to manipulate eSports. When I looked at this back in October last year, there was nothing in place to catch these guys."

Even though companies are finally closing the doors on grey market betting, Smith still thinks it's a danger area, especially as he believes that "there is no sport or activity that is deemed to have the growth potential of betting in eSports." That means that Smith, working with organisations such as ESL and SportsRadar are already putting new systems in place – new ways to monitor betting activity in an attempt to better prevent more considerable match fixing scandals. Will it be enough? Only time will tell, but we're at the tipping point now, where eSports will either thrive in the spotlight of the mainstream or succumb to its murky shadows.



“A Counter-Strike player has filed a lawsuit against Valve, accusing the publisher of allowing ‘an illegal online gambling market’ to form around its products”

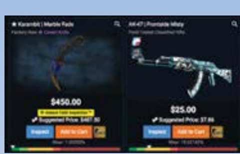
legitimacy has now been thrown into question – a point that Reddit user ‘onscreenlol’ has taken particular offence to: “If it comes out that this pot was rigged I will be so f***ing mad. I lost $7.4K in that pot.”

Valve, too, has since made moves to shut down the illegal online gambling market, stating that these sites are in complete violation of its terms of service. The publisher issued 23 cease and desist letters to gambling sites and followed that with a statement in which it made clear: “A number of gambling sites started leveraging the Steam trading system, and there’s been some false assumptions about our involvement with these sites. We’d like to clarify that we have no business relationships with any of these sites. We have never received any revenue from them. And Steam does not have a system for turning in-game items into real world currency.”

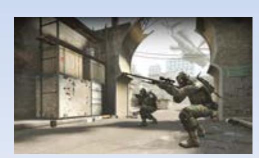
For some, however, that isn’t enough. A *Counter-Strike* player has filed a lawsuit against Valve, accusing the publisher of allowing “an illegal online gambling market” to form around its products. “In sum, Valve owns the league, sells the casino chips, and receives a piece of the casino’s income stream through foreign websites in order to maintain the charade that Valve is not promoting and profiting from online gambling, like a modern-day Captain Renault from Casablanca,” the suit alleges, referring to the 15 per cent cut Valve takes of all *CS:GO*-related purchases through the Steam Community Market. “That most of the people in the *CS:GO* gambling economy are teenagers and under 21 makes Valve’s and the other Defendants’ actions even more unconscionable.”

The streamers are also facing legal action. A parent, on behalf of their child, has filed a suit in the Southern District of Florida against Trevor ‘TmarTn’ Martin and Thomas ‘ProSyndicate’ Cassell after it became apparent they were the owners of CSGO Lotto, a popular gambling site. They are accused of “actively promoting Lotto as a gambling service, including to minors,” the suit alleges. The duo have a combined 13 million subscribers on YouTube and 3.3 million followers on Twitter.

While the lawyers we spoke with are conflicted as to the result of the lawsuit, or how long it may take to be resolved,



Websites such as OPSkins allow users to trade their digital items outside of the Steam Marketplace, trading real money for cosmetic skins that can then be used for gambling on third-party websites such as CSGOLotto.



Due to the lack of (usually expensive) gambling licenses and appropriate regulation, many forms of betting in gaming are now illegal in the UK, be it for skins or coins. That’s down to the UK Gambling Commission taking a hardline stance on what was largely considered to be a grey area.

it’s likely that we will see the first action taken against those promoting gambling in the coming weeks. The United Kingdom is to become one of the first countries in the world to actually take a stand. The UK Gambling Commission issued a paper detailing its stance on virtual currencies, eSports and social gaming, arriving at the conclusion that skin betting sites should be treated in the same way as traditional cash gambling.

“Providing facilities for gambling without a licence, or an exemption applying, is a criminal offence. Gambling is defined as betting, gaming or participating in a lottery,” said the UK Gambling Commission, which came to two important conclusions in its summary. Firstly: “Where ‘skins’ are traded or are tradeable and can therefore act as a de facto virtual currency and facilities for gambling with those items are being offered, we consider that a licence is required,” and that when it came to competitive gaming, “in the Commission’s view, the regulation of betting on eSports is no different from any other event upon which bets can be placed.”

The results have already been clear to see. While this led to the swift closure of UK-based sites such as EZSkins, it has also begun legal proceedings; thought to be the first of its kind. A YouTuber with more than 1.3 million subscribers has been charged with promoting a lottery, advertising unlawful gambling and inviting children to gamble through FUTGalaxy, TheFUTShop and MUTCoinTrader – sites that allowed you to buy and trade FIFA Ultimate Team Coins, and allowed users to wager on lottery-style games and even bet on real, live sporting events. The outcome of this trial will set huge legal precedent as the authorities try to stem illegal gambling in gaming.

Illegal gambling in *Counter-Strike* may have finally been acknowledged by Valve, and largely shut down, but it’s here where the hard work starts. When gambling is done legally, at the correct age, through licensed and regulated sites, it can be fun. But the rise of underground illicit gambling, of streamers promoting their gambling sites to indeterminate audiences, needs to stop – it isn’t smart. Expect to see a seismic shift in messaging and awareness in the weeks to come from every side. Illegal gambling in gaming is out of control and it’s finally time for change.


MAFIA III
WELCOME TO NEW BORDEAUX



HANGAR 13 DETAILS HOW ITS RE-CREATION OF NEW ORLEANS ISN'T MERE SPECTACLE, IT'S THE BACKBONE TO THE ENTIRE MAFIA III EXPERIENCE

HE BIG EASY – oh to be caught in its maw of debauchery, for even a moment; there's nothing in this world quite like it. It's a solemn city, unstable and electrifying all at the same time. That's a concoction that can be felt pulsing from every one of its eclectic sights and sounds, from the storied staging of the French Quarter to the subdued hues of the bayou. It isn't that the city of New Orleans exists exactly as it is so commonly advertised, but that it seems to stand isolated, exactly as you'd imagine it would (or ever could, for that matter). We couldn't honestly tell you whether that is for better or for worse, but that's New Orleans for you – a sinking swampland that's constantly teetering on the edge of consumption, a locale as intimately impressive as it is ultimately inspiring.

Be it from floods or fires, feuding or famish, this Louisiana landmark stands tall in the face of continuous adversity; proudly, too, though perhaps that's in spite of itself. Standing by, idly, in the French Quarter for a handful of hours – as the iconic architecture is stripped of its history and branded with hot bolts of neon come nightfall – you'll find a city that can never settle, nor does it seem to have any inclination to.

New Orleans is caught between two opposing ideals: simultaneously existing as a stage that feeds from the decadence of its heritage and a land that's starved by the suffocating reality of The American Dream. It's a truly unique city in that respect – its history is as fascinating as it is largely depressing.

It's easy to lose your heart to the real New Orleans, but you'll reclaim it, and find so much more, within *Mafia III*'s New Bordeaux. *Mafia III*'s world and story is a picture of near-perfect cohesion. That much is clear after even just a few hours spent soaking in what New Bordeaux has to offer. Many open worlds struggle to strike a balance between the demands of a narrative and the freedom afforded to you by its in-game systems. You know the games we're talking about, where your actions seem to actively work against the internal conflicts that studios seem so eager to establish among this generation of anti-heroes – tales of redemption caught amongst waves of incomprehensible violence and destruction.

That isn't the case here as Hangar 13 peels back the layers of *Mafia III* slowly, giving you time to soak in the vibe of New Bordeaux, and the intentions of protagonist Lincoln Clay, before truly letting you loose on the streets. Unlike in *Uncharted* or *Watch Dogs* – where untrained heroes battle like one-man armies – Clay is a Vietnam War veteran, trained in the art of violence and strategic reasoning, so everything that occurs in New Bordeaux is perfectly reasoned.

Art director Dave Smith tells us that New Orleans is the only place in the world where Hangar 13 thought its revenge tale could work, that "as Lincoln's character became solidified in our minds there just wasn't anywhere else that made sense." Not only is Clay familiar with explicit violence, but extreme prejudice too. His history has huge narrative benefits that give the studio the freedom to fold the cultural turbulence of the era into *Mafia III* in a way that only helps to build and establish the reality of the world around you.

"It was important that whatever we did in *Mafia III* would be respectful and not revisionist," continues Smith. "That's been the huge thing for me. Yes, we're a game that exists in an almost parallel version of our own universe, but we absolutely had to stay true to those events," he considers, noting how hard the studio has worked to capture the spirit of the period – it's the same year the Civil Rights Act of 1968 was introduced, after all.

You'll see this reflected in everything; in the aggressive language and reactions from NPCs, to even the city's police, who



Mafia III is designed in such a way that everything flows from New Bordeaux, Hangar 13's recreation of New Orleans. Everything you do in the city feeds back into your overall objective.

As it should happen, New Orleans is actually the perfect fit for a Mafia game. The city is home to one of the oldest crime families in American history, and it is thought that the Italian mob actually had control of much of the streets back in the Sixties.

may approach you with suspicions raised should you do anything as innocuous as linger outside of a shop in a rich neighbourhood. Many of the citizens are afraid of Lincoln, and not because of the weaponry he has amassed beneath his shirt, but because of the colour of his skin – it paints a terrifying picture of life in the Sixties, helping to effortlessly sell his character, and the world, as a living, breathing entity.

"HANGAR 13 HAD TO COMPLETELY REDESIGN THE CITY THAT INSPIRED IT"

"You can't have a mixed-race character in the Deep South in 1968 and not reflect that", says Andrew Wilson, with the executive producer noting that Hangar 13 never once considered easing up the tone. "I'd be more worried if we hadn't done it, because that would have opened us up to real criticism. That would have made a bit of a mockery of trying to set it in [1968]. That year in particular, it was a turbulent year, particularly in terms of civil rights. It would have been offensive and weird; it was never even a discussion that we wouldn't do it."

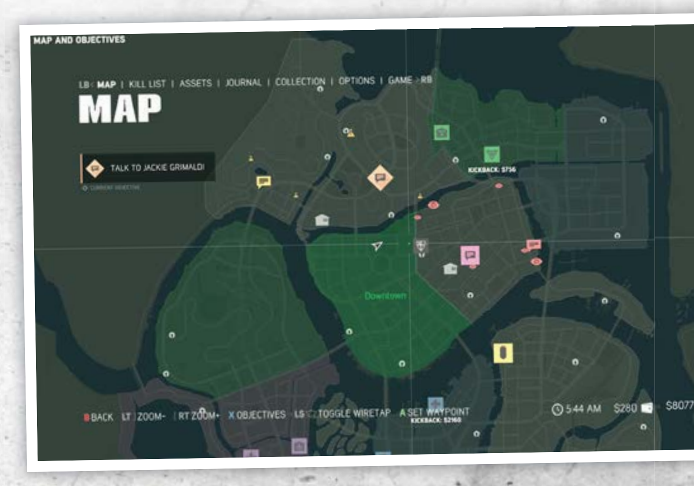


Attention to detail and a lack of compromise are without question two of Hangar 13's strengths as a studio, and that consistency extends into the structure of the game itself. New Bordeaux isn't merely a beautiful set designed to house your darkest, most murderous desires – it's a space that had to support and contort to all of *Mafia*'s most important gameplay pillars.

Everything you do in *Mafia III* feeds towards the end goal, towards Clay enacting revenge against the Italian crime syndicate that murdered his family in cold blood. Every illicit action you commit is ultimately reactive, be it shattering prostitution rings, murdering mobsters or torching hideouts. While it could ultimately prove to be restrictive – there are no side-quests in Mafia III nor are there any distractions to find – everything you do in New Bordeaux is directly tied to the narrative, putting huge emphasis on the world itself, perhaps more so than any open-world game that has come before it.

If the city itself didn't look convincing, if it didn't *feel* real – like it had been ripped from time and perfectly preserved in virtual form – then the rest of *Mafia III* just wouldn't work. But in order for Hangar 13 to tell this story, to create this cohesive experience, it had to redesign the city of New Orleans.

"The city is a character unto itself," muses Smith, Hangar 13's art director charged with bringing the aesthetic of *Mafia III*'s virtual version of New Orleans to life. "It's an amazing melting pot of culture. It's a city with a long history, a broad socio-economic



New Bordeaux isn't a perfect re-creation of New Orleans, in the sense that it isn't accurate to a map. But, it does look and sound exactly as you'd picture the city would, which in many ways makes it superior to a 1:1 creation.



There's more to life in New Bordeaux than the French Ward and swampy bayou. There's plenty to see, do (and murder) in Frisco Fields, the Harbor and Downtown areas too.

spectrum and, visually, it's no slouch either – it's a beautiful place to get to play in," he continues, wistfully. "We wanted to make sure that it all came through."

For all of that to come through, for Hangar 13 to tell the story it wanted to tell in a fully-functioning open world the team had to redesign the city that inspired it. The layout has changed, the streets are wider and elevation has been introduced into what should be an otherwise flat locale.

"As somebody who had never visited New Orleans before the start of the project, I had the preconceived conceptions – the Hollywood version of it. It was the French Quarter and it was the Bayou, they are the main two… they resonate really well [with players]," says Smith, noting the challenges of re-creating a city so classically associated with just two areas. It meant the team had to get creative, to push players beyond a "superficial understanding of what New Orleans is like."

Smith tells us that Hangar 13 knew it was onto something once it had built the French Ward – *Mafia III*'s version of the iconic French Quarter. So strong is that area in *Mafia III*, that its positioning has actually been altered entirely. "It's no accident that our version of the French Ward is right slap bang in the middle of the city, you're forced to cross it anytime you want to go anywhere else, and that's the touchstone that keeps you grounded."

Ultimately, it isn't just the layout of New Orleans that facilitated taking creative liberties, but logistical reasoning too. It's a big city, but it's also full of small nooks and tight alleyways. The streets were widened to fit vehicles, the environment latitude varied to allow for better "Hollywood action racing", the bayou brought in closer to the downtown hub, and, well, Hangar 13 was even struggling to fit Clay's muscular frame into the claustrophobic alleyways of Canal Street and French Quarter. "Our character requires three meters of clearance for the camera to be around him, right? How do you take that small alleyway in real life and transform it into a playable space?

The answer? Hangar 13 is pitching for cinematic realism over 1:1 recreation. There's a reason *Mafia III* is set within New Bordeaux, not New Orleans directly, and this is largely why. This is a fictionalised version of the famous city, albeit one with a wicked attention to real details to help solidify it in the player's mind.

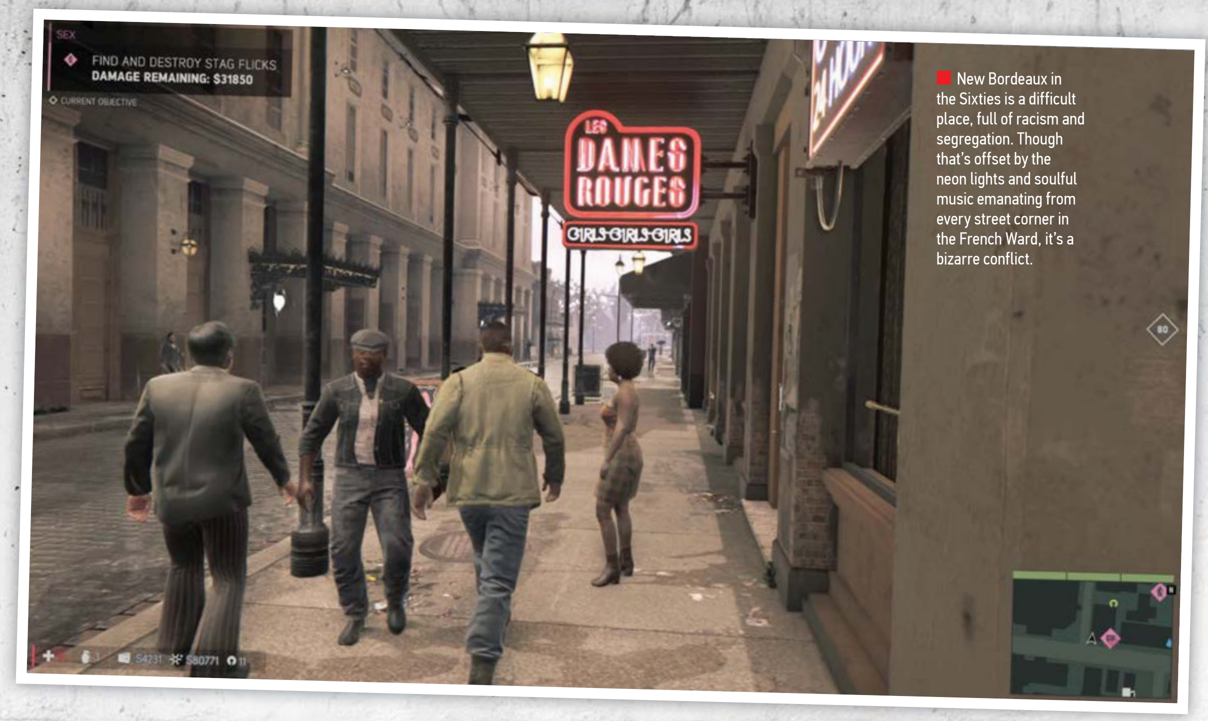
"Just because it's a great layout for a city that people live in, doesn't mean it's a great layout for gameplay spaces," says Wilson, who notes that creating a sense of place in New Bordeaux that's so strong it could be confused with New Orleans has been one of the biggest efforts for Hangar 13. "We didn't want to say to our

SOULFUL SOUNDS OF THE SIXTIES

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE MUSIC TO MAFIA III?

"When it's not playing you really miss it!" It's a simple statement of fact from Andrew Wilson, because the music makes up so much of the experience in *Mafia III*. Walking around New Orleans, you'll still get a sense of its blues and jazz roots, you'll occasionally hear a rogue trombone echoing down a distant street, but it isn't quite the hotbed of carefree expression that you might imagine it to be. Not so in New Bordeaux – music merges with the neon sights to perfectly create a sense of place. "Our audio director will be thrilled to hear me say this, but it's 50 per cent of the experience. It just soaks you in this time and place.

"New Orleans is a musical city and so is New Bordeaux. [In] the French Ward at night you can see the jazz bars pouring out onto the streets and you can walk into the smoky lounges and see what's going on [inside] – it's all part of it. It's an awesome era to be able to pick from. Honestly, we were kind of surprised by how much of it we got and some of the stuff that we got… we got a bit of everybody, and there are some people (I can't really say who) that we really didn't think we were going to get that we did! It's an extensive playlist for sure."



New Bordeaux in the Sixties is a difficult place, full of racism and segregation. Though that's offset by the neon lights and soulful music emanating from every street corner in the French Ward, it's a bizarre conflict.

designers, 'here's this city block, now go and make gameplay work within it.' It was more, 'let's mould the structure of the city, the internals of it, around the type of play that we want to produce'."

In a sense, New Bordeaux is actually a beautiful piece of deception, a visual trick in constant motion. From the moment you pick up the gamepad and begin skulking around its streets, there's a part of your brain that will think Hangar 13 has transformed you into a perfect recreation of New Orleans. Realistically, that's because it isn't cartographer perfect, but *picture* perfect – it's exactly as you imagine the city to look, sound and be. That's the cinematic realism rearing its head, though it even extends out of the obvious areas – such as the French Quarter, Canal Street and swampy bayou – but to even the working-class neighbourhoods and the above-ground tombs of NOLA's famous cemeteries. All the elements you'd expect from New Orleans are there – designed to look as they do in real life, tweaked ever so slightly.

As we said, nailing the details has made this all possible and it's hugely impressive. Changing surface details, such as location and latitude, isn't a bother when you're distracted so consistently by the neon lights and soulful sounds emanating from every corner of this world.

Such attention to detail took research, of course. With Wilson noting that many of the team have been stationed in New Orleans in an effort to visually reproduce the city – the devil is in the detail, not on a Wikipedia page. "There's a ton of information on the internet obviously, and it's much easier now to do it from afar than it used to be… but in terms of actually trying to visually reproduce the city, we have people here to soak it in and take photos."

While Smith points to his "sociopath" approach to ensuring all of the details are correct. Ultimately, *Mafia III* is all the better because of it. "I don't think I ever feel constrained by the raw set," he says, on whether the real design of New Orleans was a restrictive canvas. "But I feel like I have an enormous sense of responsibility to get the small stuff right. About making sure that the signage is correct; I'm an absolute sociopath about typefaces and things like that – it's those low levels things that will constantly pop you out of the game if you don't get them right."

After hours with the game, we can say with some certainty that Hangar 13 has certainly gotten them right.

As we said, New Orleans is a place to lose your heart to and it's one of the strangest and most interesting places in America, but New Bordeaux has something that its real-life counterpart may have lost over the years – soul. It's a perfect caricature. Painting a picture of constant movement, music and mayhem. *Mafia III* brings you into a world that doesn't quite exist in real life anymore, but to one that lives and breathes inside of your mind. In this respect, it doesn't matter how *Mafia III* performs as a game – *not really.* Because for the virtual tourists amongst us, the digital explorers armed with an in-game camera and desire to discover, there will be no better time or place to visit than New Bordeaux in 1968.



Reviews

72 **ReCore**
Xbox One

74 **World Of Warcraft: Legion**
PC

75 **The Turing Test**
Xbox One, PC

76 **PES 2017**
PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC

78 **Bound**
PS4

79 **Madden NFL 17**
PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360

80 **Grow Up**
PS4, Xbox One, PC

81 **The Tomorrow Children**
PS4

82 **King Of Fighters XIII**
PS4

83 **God Eater 2: Rage Burst**
PS4, PS Vita, PC

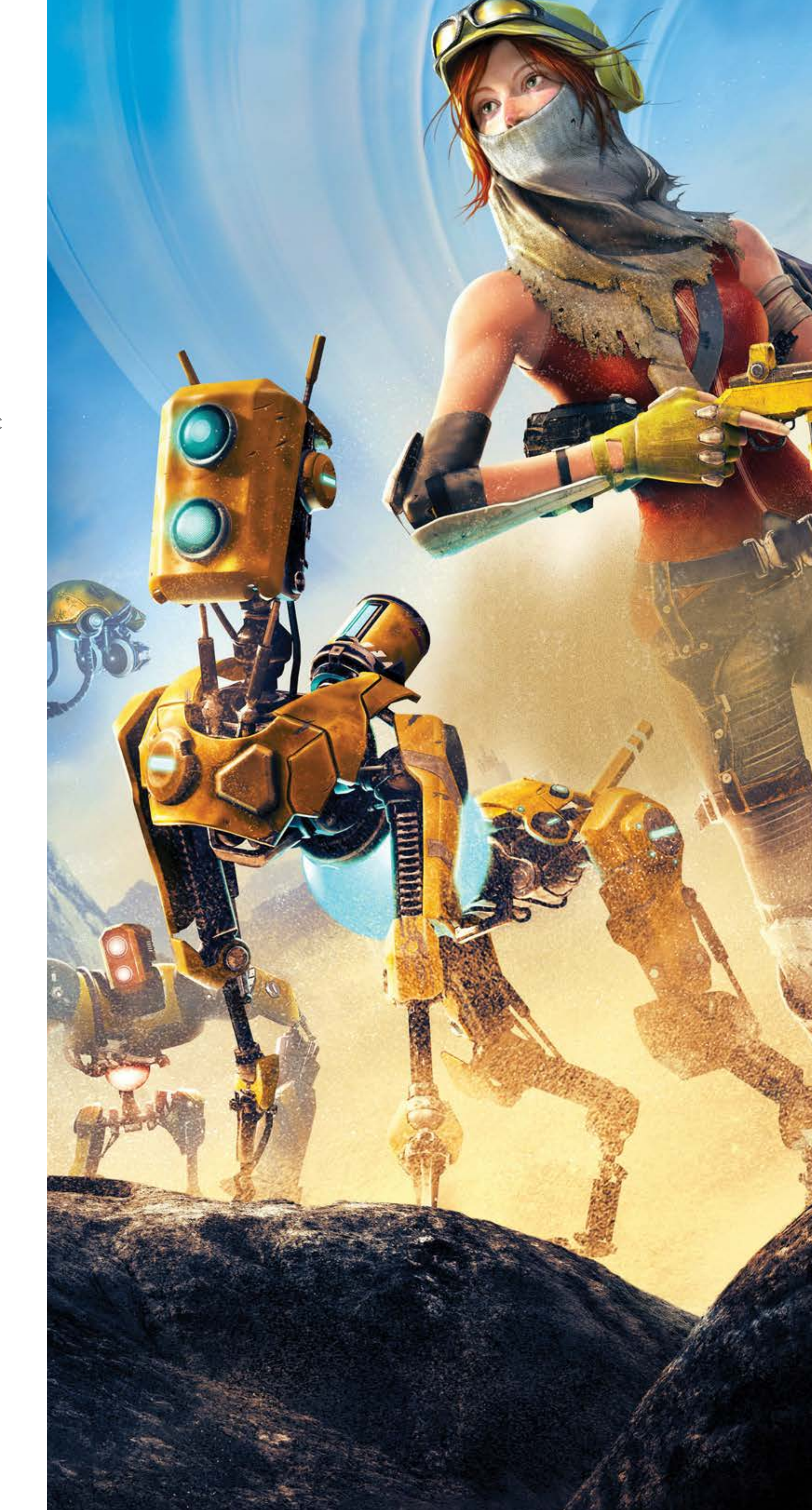
84 **This Is The Police**
PC

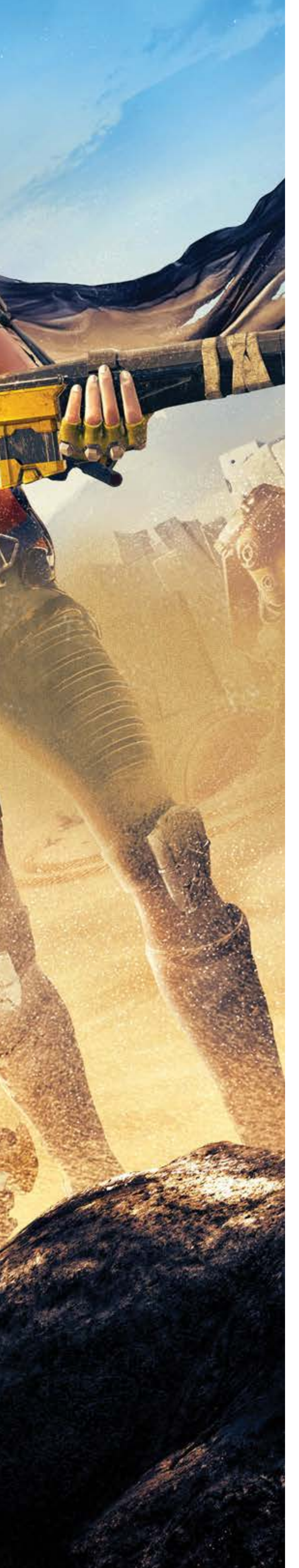
85 **Master of Orion**
PC

74

RECORE

Have the makers of Metroid and Mega Man combined to make the game we hoped for?





THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

Let us know through the following channels:



@gamesTMmag #gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright



IS THIS THE RETURN OF DOUBLE-A GAMING?

ReCore

Half an hour after starting ReCore, you may start to notice it all seems vaguely familiar. The combat feels like *Earth Defense Force*, the plaftorming like *Enslaved*, the exploration like *Darksiders*. But although it derives its various elements from better-known games, the final mix somehow feels fresh. As Joules, a scavenger and mechanic marooned on a desert planet, you pick through ruins (and the hulls of any robots you destroy) locating machine parts, which can then be used either to upgrade your android companion, Mack, or reawaken dormant engine cores inside abandoned dungeons.

Tonally, *ReCore* is somewhere between *Destiny* and *Ratchet & Clank*. This is a light, breezy, occasionally energetic sci-fi shooter with ostensibly basic ambitions. You finish a platforming puzzle. You shoot robots. You collect your trinkets and upgrade your gear, start a new mission, then do it all again. Joseph Staten – who in fact wrote *Destiny*, hence the similarities – keeps *ReCore* moving. Compared to some of his previous work, *ReCore*, thankfully, doesn't get bogged down in lore or jargon. Visually, too, it's perfectly pleasing. The desert planet is reminiscent of Avalanche's dull, but at least pretty, *Mad Max* game while the combat, when it heats up, is as colourful as *Vanquish* or *Binary Domain*. Keiji Inafune, of *Dead Rising*, *Mega Man* and – most recently and scandalously – *Mighty No 9* fame, serves as *ReCore*'s producer, and in the game's more kinetic moments, you can sense his hand. It certainly flows nicely.

Jointly developed by Japan's Comcept and America's Armature Studio, and comprising exploration, combat and platforming elements, *ReCore* is nevertheless consistent. At its very best, this is a welcoming, lean and entertaining third-person action game.

The longer it goes on, however, the less disciplined *ReCore* becomes. Like its very evident inspirations, *ReCore* is strongest at its most reserved. The interior missions are straightforward but complex; tough enemies, fought one-on-one, are more intelligible and enjoyable than crowds. But the game insists on opening up. What begins as a streamlined action-platformer balloons into a flabby, often lost open-world game, which insists on playing to its own weaknesses. *ReCore*'s landscape, a desert, long departed by any human life, is a boring one to explore. It's no wonder the game goes to such pained lengths to introduce its fast-travel system: players will be using it a lot. There are optional areas to explore, side-missions and collectables, but they are all either lifeless or familiar. Travelling through *ReCore* is less an experience, in the grandiose sense, and more a dispassionate virtual junk hunt.

Joules is a welcome presence. Her sprightly attitude and snappy back and forths with Mack keep up *ReCore*'s energy. Similarly, the platforming and combat are simple and clean. You can jump, double jump and boost, and use different coloured ammunition to fight colour-coded enemies. If you see a red robot, switch to red bullets. If a boss swaps colours mid-fight, changing from blue to red to yellow to white, it becomes a neat test of your reflexes and identification skills. In other games, this kind of play would be framed with more lingo and complexity – instead of simply using red ammo for red enemies, you'd have to cycle to armour-piercing or high-explosive rounds, and learn gradually what works against what. Clearly, *ReCore*'s creators

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: Japan/US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft Studios
DEVELOPER: Comcept/ Armature Studio
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

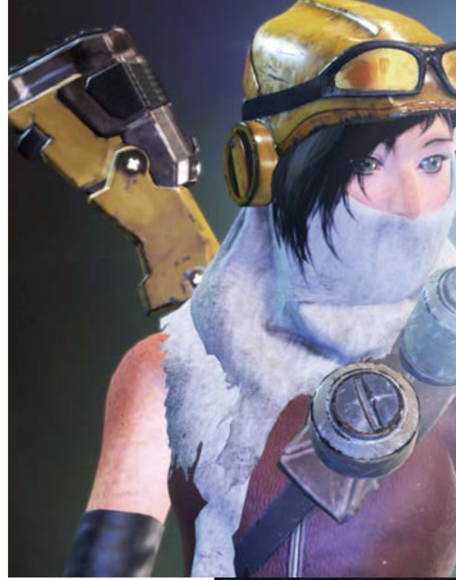
BETTER THAN

DARKSIDERS 2



AS GOOD AS

ENSLAVED: ODYSSEY TO THE WEST



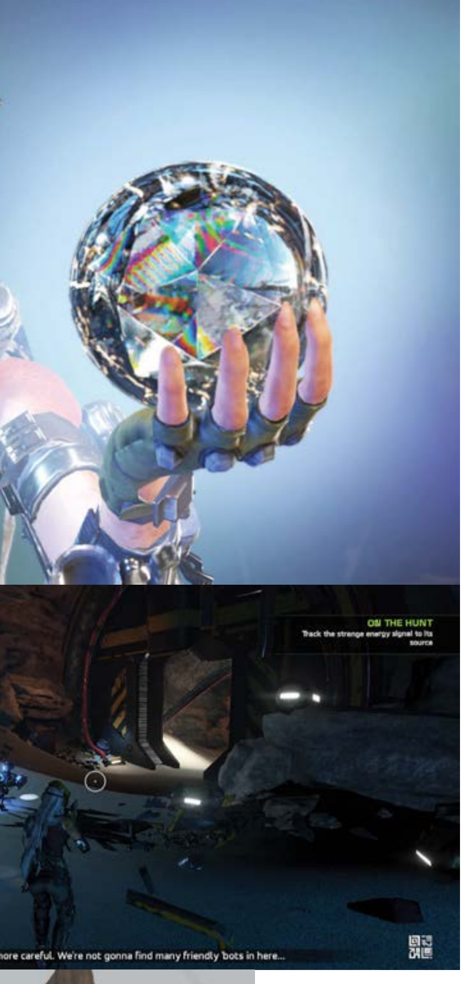
Above: Written by Joseph Staten, who scripted Bungie's massive MMO shooter *Destiny*, *ReCore* manages to dispense with long-winded exposition and jargon in favour of a simple, tangible story. Main character Joules is particularly well written and performed, thankfully.

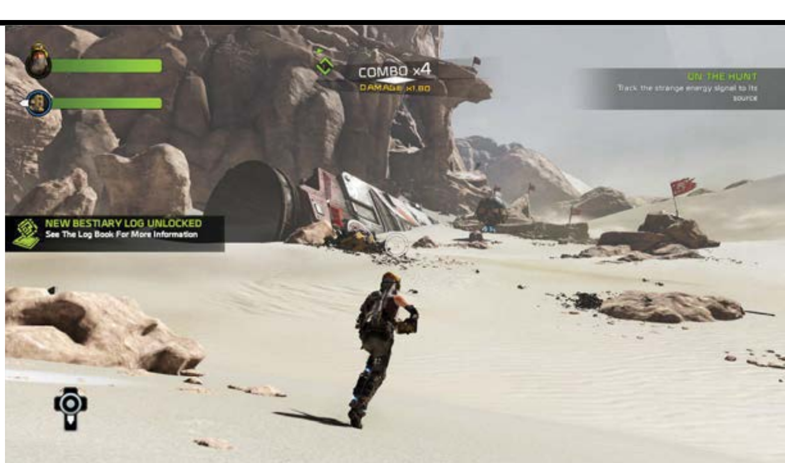


Below: Using only Joules' double-jump ability and booster boots, navigation in *ReCore* is simple and fluid.

THE LONGER IT GOES ON, THE LESS DISCIPLINED RECORE BECOMES







Right: At its best, *ReCore* is a contained, linear action/platform game. However, seemingly out of a desire to compete with today's biggest franchises, it's been filled with unnecessary mechanics and conceits such as an open world and character customisation

are skilled in tangible, contained design. It's a shame that the overarching game, and the run time, weren't governed by the same economy as the combat.

There was a time, before the market for boxed videogames became dominated by maybe three publishers, each with three or four franchises, when more modest, double-A games both existed and could make money. The PlayStation 2 era in particular ushered forth a litany of such titles, produced on smaller budgets than triple-A blockbusters and by teams of maybe 20 or 30 people. It is these games, like *Primal*, *Okami* or *Ico*, with which *ReCore* has its best elements in common. Nevertheless, the game attempts, foolishly, to compete with the biggest, most lucrative modern series. What could – and should – have felt like a revival of the forgotten, arguably more colourful and creative middle tier of game development feels instead like a lesser alternative to the new mainstream.

ReCore doesn't need character customisation, optional quests and an open-world. Not only do they detract from the game's central pleasures, they expose its lower production value. When it's a narrowed action platformer, *ReCore* feels every bit the slick, professional project, but once it becomes a sandbox game, and in the process invites comparison to mega-titles like *Skyrim* and *The Witcher*, it simply cannot compete and begins to look ragged. *ReCore* has many idiosyncratic qualities, or at least a style which – after being absent from games for so many years – feels fresh today. But it plays to neither. Instead of presenting as a wholly different kind of experience to triple-A games, it tries to convince you that it's a comparable alternative. As a result, it's neither a modest game, evidently free of the creative shackles that big budgets and high expectations normally apply, nor a fully formed, mainstream action game.

Still, *ReCore* is breezier, smarter and more accessible than a lot of its moneyed, would-be contemporaries. Traversing its empty open world is a chore, but when the game carries you indoors and places you inside one of its finely tuned dungeon-style levels, it's unquestionably good, old-fashioned fun.

SYNTHESIS
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

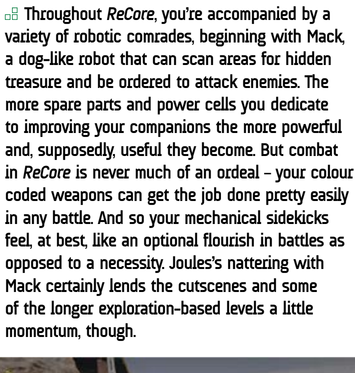
JURY-RIGGED: Combat is akin to *Vanquish*, platforming to *Heavenly Sword*, characters and dialogue to *Destiny*. But *ReCore* combines it all into an occasionally fresh-feeling final experience.

FAQs

Q. DID KEIJI INAFUNE DIRECT THIS GAME?
He's credited as producer, but various parts of *ReCore* feel like his handiwork. Mark Pacini, of Metroid Prime, directed.

Q. WHAT'S THE PLOT?
You're a lone scavenger stuck on a deserted planet. By reactivating various robots and old ruins you hope to reconnect with the rest of humanity.

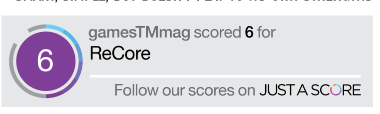
Q. IS RECORE AN OPEN-WORLD GAME?
Yes, but not to the extent of something like *Assassin's Creed* or *Grand Theft Auto*. There is an over world connecting *ReCore*'s levels. Sadly, it's pretty dead.

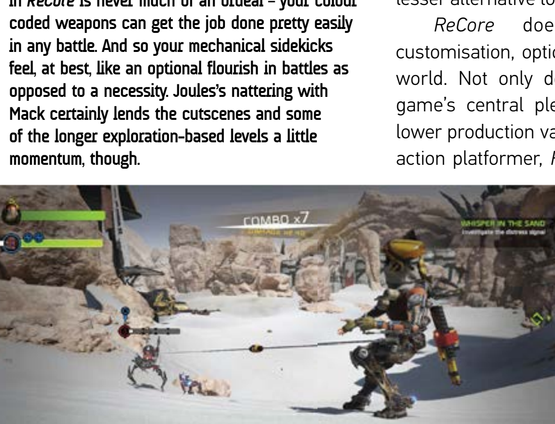


SIC 'EM!

Throughout *ReCore*, you're accompanied by a variety of robotic comrades, beginning with Mack, a dog-like robot that can scan areas for hidden treasure and be ordered to attack enemies. The more spare parts and power cells you dedicate to improving your companions the more powerful and, supposedly, useful they become. But combat in *ReCore* is never much of an ordeal – your colour coded weapons can get the job done pretty easily in any battle. And so your mechanical sidekicks feel, at best, like an optional flourish in battles as opposed to a necessity. Joules's nattering with Mack certainly lends the cutscenes and some of the longer exploration-based levels a little momentum, though.

VERDICT
SMART, SIMPLE, BUT DOESN'T PLAY TO ITS OWN STRENGTHS









The class halls might not be much more than a reworking of the garrisons – which sounds like a negative – but they don't feel quite as empty and are devised in a much more organic and fruitful way.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

World Of Warcraft: Legion



With a new *WOW* expansion pack you're not really critiquing the state of MMOs anymore. You can't compare it with more recent, modern equivalents, argue that the genre has moved on beyond the incredibly archaic hotkey-based combat or even draw attention to innovations that have failed to reach the decade-old game. No, instead it seems that nowadays there's little else for comparison beyond *World Of Warcraft* – and its numerous expansion packs – itself. And if this is the case, well then *Legion* ought to stand out as one of the more significant releases for the franchise.

That's not to say it does much to shift the game and its mechanics in any real, tangible way, but instead that Blizzard – despite what the rage-fuelled sentences you might read on the internet might say – has clearly listened to critics and fans alike about where *Warlords Of Draenor* fell short. While the story of the expansion pack and many of its new features felt great on first glance, it was clear by the endgame that such facets were not quite as finely honed as they ought to be. This is *Legion*'s biggest improvement, creating an almost single-player experience as part of the levelling progression – and, honestly, this is the most individual player-focused expansion pack yet – before offering up a host of content to wade through once each of the new areas have been cleared of quest markers.

This is handled in a number of ways, from the detailed story elements of the expansion pack, the artifact weapons that give a sense of additional progress or even the Demon Hunter class that brings a sense of action to an otherwise button-heavy combat system. Even the class halls – which are hubs for anyone of your character's class – are little more than the reworked and criticised garrisons of *Warlords,* but with the flaws thrown out. They provide a greater depth of story and often feel like you're making considerable improvements to them and to your character, and are busy with people too.

The initial content – both levelling and endgame – is perhaps the most sizeable of any expansion pack yet, and yet while there is grinding to be seen through by the time you (once again) reach max level, it's handled in a much more manageable and entertaining fashion. Naturally the true value of any *World Of Warcraft* expansion pack comes not in its initial content, but in the weeks and (hopefully) months that follow, and that's impossible to judge. However, with the addition of artifact weapons – which are intended to last all expansion pack and can barely reach a third of their ultimate power by the end of the expac's content – it could be that Blizzard has released and set up to produce what may well go down in history as *World Of Warcraft*'s best expansion pack yet.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Blizzard Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £34.99 + subscription
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer
MINIMUM SPEC: 3.2 GHz Dual Core CPU, 512MB GPU, 2GB RAM, 45GB hard drive space, internet connection
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN


WARLORDS OF DRAENOR

AS GOOD AS


WRATH OF THE LICH KING

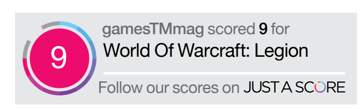
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

HEAR US ROAR: All the changes and upgrades made here seem almost driven by complaints from the community, and while it's true that Blizzard will never please everyone, it has – at least – done a great job of listening where it can.

VERDICT

A FUN NEW CLASS AND THE BEST ENDGAME YET



THE RESULTS ARE IN

The Turing Test





Above: *The Turing Test* is visually impressive in short bursts, with most test chambers being pretty bland variations of white and grey panelling. The frame rate wasn't always amazing and pauses for loading between chambers could be annoying.

About halfway through *The Turing Test* we were worried it was going to continue to be a rather pale imitation of a great first-person puzzler. We can't avoid the comparison with *Portal* and we're not sure Bulkhead would want us to. The appreciation and understanding of how the Valve puzzle game worked is apparent. Thankfully this game is more than just a cheap copy, as it uses our expectations and understanding to play with some interesting ideas.

That all said, *The Turing Test* offers little by way of truly innovative gameplay, so if you're looking for a puzzler that's going to break the mould or demand weird leaps of thinking, look elsewhere. What it does offer is about four hours of solid, engaging test chambers set up to challenge your lateral thinking and spatial awareness. As you lead Ava Turing through a research station on Jupiter's moon Europa, you interact with T.O.M., the station's AI, leading to a series of conversations about consciousness, morality and how these things are determined. The chambers themselves have apparently been created by your colleagues in an attempt to keep T.O.M. from finding them, as they act as a form of Turing test against artificial intelligence.

The narrative that simmers quietly beneath the game really bursts through at the halfway point, as a turn in the story opens up new gameplay mechanics. We won't say too much more about that so as not to spoil it, but it sends the game down a route of questioning everything you think you understand about your role and mission, while simultaneously widening your toolbox and making the puzzles a little more challenging.

We didn't really hit any great roadblocks in our journey through the game though, and the pacing of the puzzles is rather nicely done. The key to the game is the transfer of energy using an Energy Manipulation Tool (another nod to Portal in many respects) to open and close doors, activate machinery and generally clear your path to the exit. As other smaller mechanics come and go, this remains at the heart of the experience. One particularly nice touch is side chambers that are significantly harder or more time-consuming, but completely optional. Attacking these offers all sorts of odd bonus interactions and experiences that reveal more about the broader story.

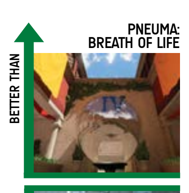
Building on what it achieved with *Pneuma: Breath Of Life*, *The Turing Test* is a far more robust, captivating and fulfilling experience. It's not breaking ground, but it explores some fun ideas and challenges you to follow them. As a sign of Bulkhead's growing confidence and ambition, it's a fantastic step.

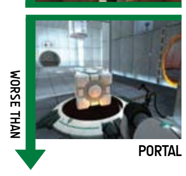
DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Bulkhead Interactive
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

PNEUMA: BREATH OF LIFE





WORSE THAN

PORTAL

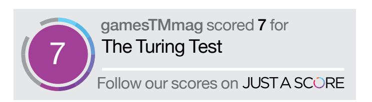
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

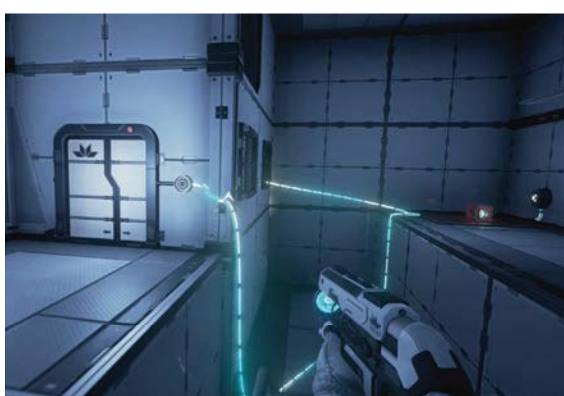
CHATTERBOX: It's a difficult thing to judge, but does the protagonist need to talk in this game? Would leaving it up to the player to respond for themselves give the game's finale more punch? We think it might have.

VERDICT

ENGAGING BUT LACKING IN ORIGINALITY



Below: As well as your Energy Manipulation Tool, there are a number of game features that will feel very familiar to anyone who has visited Aperture Science's laboratories.





KONAMI'S GOT THE WORLD IN MOTION

PES 2017

It's time for legacy *PES* fans to stop talking about the PS2. It was a long time ago, but this fact of life has eluded plenty of die-hards who still like to harp on about the good old days. *PES 2017* is the best version of Konami's football sim in a long while, and to compare it to the old days is a little unfair. This is a new beast, with new mechanics that represent the game coming of age in the *FOX Engine*, and overall it's a thoroughly refreshing football experience.

Several gameplay systems have been under review for years now, but it feels like PES Productions has finally worked out how to get first touches right. Before now, it was either 50 pence foot shenanigans or *Sensible Soccer*-style sticky boots – neither of which have ever done the great art of the first touch any justice. The new Real Touch system introduced in *PES 2017* adds a new level of unpredictability and – as a natural byproduct – inconsistency that makes the brief periods you have the ball at your feet an interesting and intricate affair, whether it's your first game or your 500th.

We say brief because, as ever, *Pro Evo* is all about passing – whether building slowly from the back or utilising one-touch football in your midfield to break down even the most stubborn of back lines. It's as hard as ever to actually run at individual players and beat them for pace or mug them off with a delicious spin move – clicking in the right stick and then wiggling it about while doing a million other things isn't the most elegant system.

But what of that elusive, proverbial '*PES* feel'? Present and correct, as it happens. There's a lot to be said for a game that rewards good timing and impeccable awareness – often this minute attention to detail is only truly prevalent in fighting games. A lot of people will struggle to see where this feeling comes from, but it's clear to us after putting several hours into the game that no two passes, shots or tackles are ever the same. We're talking about a severely complex algorithm at engine level that references player

Right: Due to dynamic passing, anything can happen in a match.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: PES Productions
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8 (2-22 ONLINE)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

FAQs

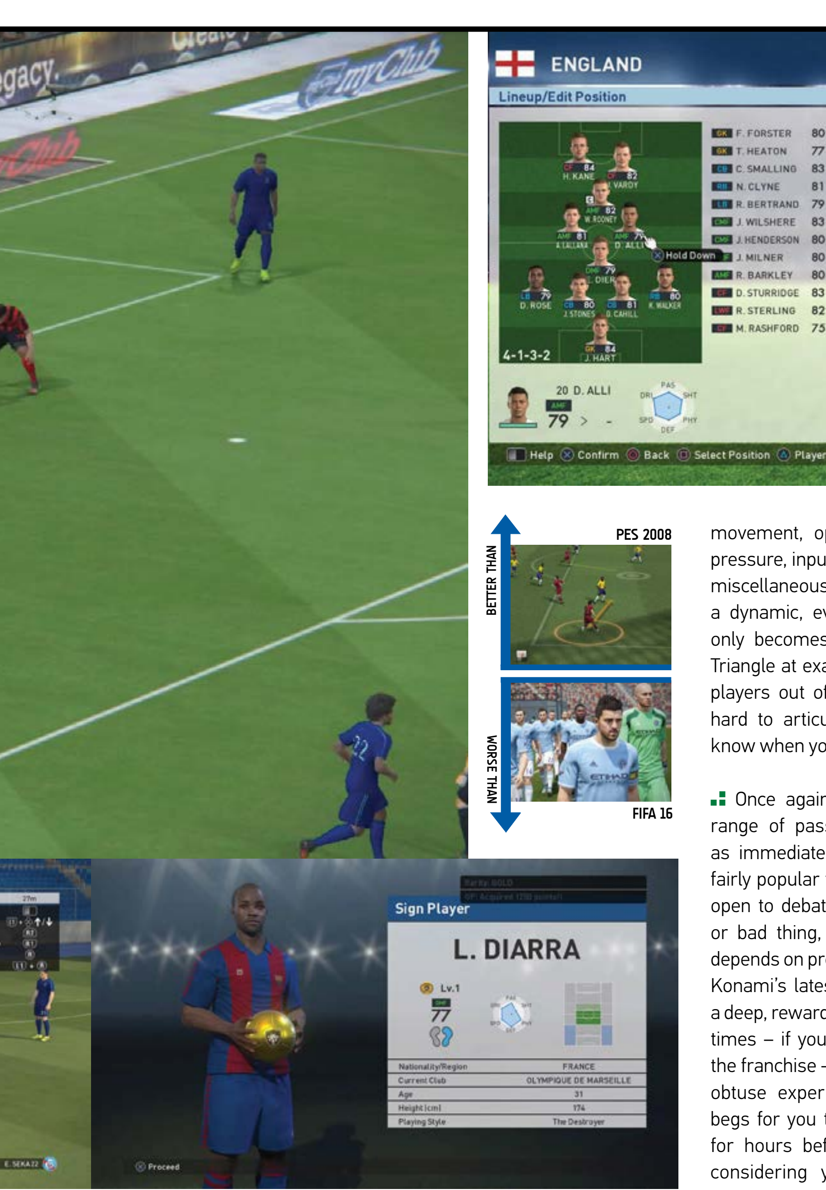
Q. IS IT BETTER THAN FIFA?
Who cares? Stop asking us, please. It's completely open to interpretation.

Q. ARE THERE REAL PLAYERS?
Yes, thankfully. Despite the hilarious fake team names, real players have been included, as well as their likenesses.

Q. IS IT EASY TO BEAT PLAYERS?
No – *PES* isn't one to let you waltz easily around the opposition. Passing is most definitely your friend.



IT'S CLEAR AFTER PUTTING SEVERAL HOURS INTO THE GAME THAT NO TWO PASSES, SHOTS OR TACKLES ARE EVER THE SAME



Left: International teams are present and correct, although we did notice some glaring discrepancies in the lineups.

movement, opponent movement, defensive pressure, input precision and all sorts of other miscellaneous football alchemy that results in a dynamic, ever-changing environment that only becomes truly apparent when you hit Triangle at exactly the right time and cut four players out of the game with one pass. It's hard to articulate effectively here; you just know when you've done it.

Once again, due to *PES 2017*'s technical range of passing and slower pace, it isn't as immediately playable as a certain other, fairly popular football franchise. Naturally, it's open to debate as to whether this is a good or bad thing, and this sort of thing largely depends on preference. What you will get from Konami's latest effort is a deep, rewarding and, at times – if you're new to the franchise – decidedly obtuse experience that begs for you to practice for hours before really considering yourself a competent player.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

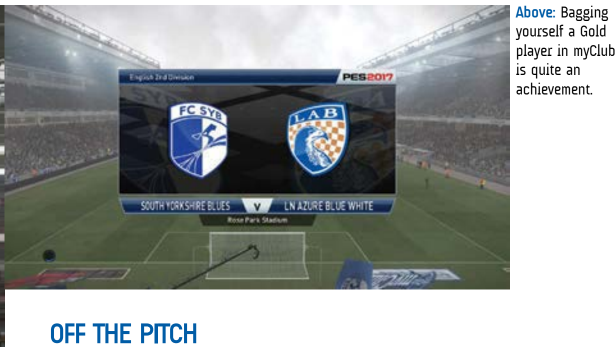
TOUCH OF CLASS: The new Real Touch feature, introduced in this version, instantly adds a level of unpredictability and fidelity to gameplay that wasn't present in previous entries in the series.

Whatever happens, it's impossible to escape the fact that Konami's prowess in this field lies far less in the overall presentation of the strange, hyperactive world of professional football than it does in well-thought-out mechanics. Despite laying claim to the rights to FC Barcelona's ground, Camp Nou, for the next few years, *PES 2017* still only has a handful of properly licensed teams to its name. This means that, once again, if you want to couple the strong gameplay on offer here with a complement of the teams you know and love (and despise) then you're going to have to rename them and change their kits manually. The players themselves are present and correct, but playing as East Dorsetshire against London FC just doesn't ring true with the professional display that the rest of the game purveys. Like in recent years, you can download team data files full of pretty decent community-created kits, but only if you happen to be a PS4 player.

Many of you will claim that this is all cosmetic, and you'd be right. Our argument is that if a football game of this quality also benefitted from the sort of roster fidelity and authentic match day presentation that *FIFA* purveys, wouldn't it be even better? Yes, it would. Spending hours renaming teams and adjusting kits feels like an unnecessary step.

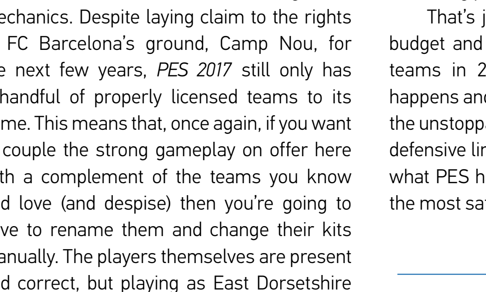
Other areas aren't quite perfect, either. For the most part, PES Productions' animation team has done a great job with *PES 2017*, but there are times where general animations feel nothing short of wooden and shallow. Lighting also seems a little off – there's not a lot to talk about in terms of dynamic shadows cast by large stadiums, causing a lot of the pitches in the game to look like large, luminous front lawns. Still, you have no choice but to judge these minor insufficiencies against the compelling gameplay on show here, and you soon forgive most of *PES 2017*'s minor problems as soon as you've caught an audacious high ball on the volley and sent it careening past a hapless keeper.

That's just it, really. At times it feels low budget and it's hard to look past unlicensed teams in 2016, but then that perfect goal happens and you forget; your senses dulled by the unstoppable one-touch move that peeled a defensive line like a big sweaty banana. That's what PES has always been about, and this is the most satisfying Pro Evolution Soccer ever.





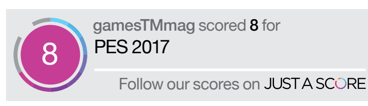
Above: Bagging yourself a Gold player in myClub is quite an achievement.



OFF THE PITCH

PES 2017 comes with a suite of online and offline game modes to get stuck into that test your skills off the pitch as well. Master League returns again this year, which to the uninitiated is a manager mode in which you build a team through scouting and transfers. Become A Legend allows you to create a player and play through their career, moving from club to club as your star rises. myClub is a more easily understandable version of *FIFA*'s Ultimate Team, and it's arguably more enjoyable, too. With these three, plus a strong online suite, there's an awful lot to do in this year's iteration.

VERDICT
ANOTHER BIG STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



PLIÉ ACCESS

Bound

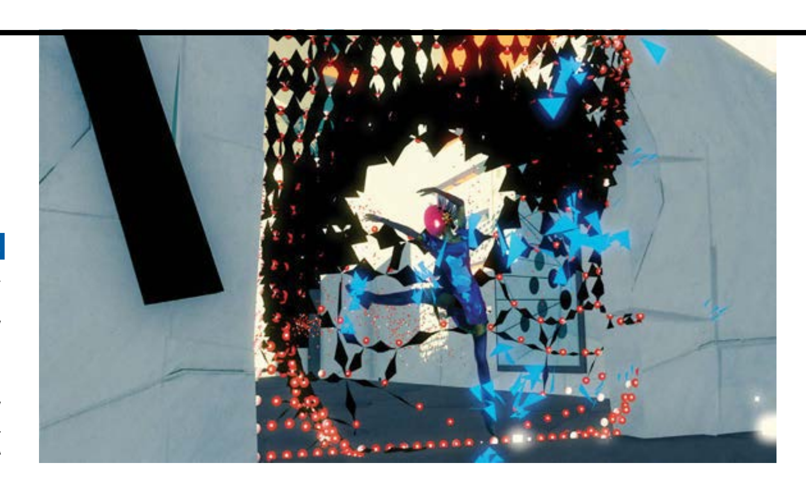
With gaming now well into its fifth decade, you'd be forgiven for thinking that developers might be starting to run out of truly original ideas. Granted, innovation within the triple-A space typically happens on a modest, iterative level within tried-and-tested formats where overthinking mechanics and designs can end up costing millions, but the indie scene remains a hotbed for creative concepts and experiences you've never seen before and likely never will again. That's a description that certainly stands up for *Bound*, a playable piece of performance art with stunning stylised presentation and an intentionally vague narrative and a creative work where style over substance isn't necessarily a criticism.

It's gameplay rather than anything else that can be said to lack substance – *Bound*'s loose story isn't something that will speak to everyone but anyone touched by anything close to the thematic elements it experiments with will likely find themselves moved by it in some way. In terms of actually playing the thing, though, *Bound* stumbles in the exact same manner as so many of its contemporaries: by trying too hard to be a videogame in the expected sense of the word. Like *Abzû*'s rudimentary puzzle-solving, *Bound*'s core mechanics are serviceable at best, yet made to look all the more clumsy by the elegant movement of the protagonist when doing anything other than interacting with the basic platforming elements. For a game that so often amazes with its slick balletic movements, every awkward fall or glitchy collision feels like a *Swan Lake* faceplant, completely at odds with the grace of regular movement and massively jarring as a result. Similarly, the dancing mechanic – used to traverse the majority of the game's obstacles – allows you to perform some truly captivating feats of agility, but the fact that these never really sync up with the beautiful minimal soundtrack (or alter it accordingly) feels at odds with the very nature of dance.

Despite such issues, however, *Bound* continually finds new ways to impress from an aesthetic standpoint. From pirouetting through walls of beads to taking in shifting stages and undulating seas as you slide effortlessly along a huge ribbon after clearing an area, it's as sumptuous as it is unique in its presentation. As a game, *Bound* is clearly flawed – its structure, however, is excellent and well realised to support multiple playthroughs with noticeably different experiences – but as an experience, as a piece of interactive art, it's frequently sensational. Those on the hunt for a solid platformer can dance on, then, but anyone open to new concepts (such as the idea of exploring abstract art via dance) will probably find quite a lot to like. *Bound* is an oddity, but an absolutely gorgeous one.

DETAILS

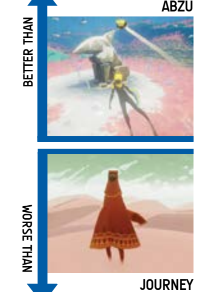
FORMAT: PS4
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Plastic/Santa Monica Studio
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



MISSING LINK

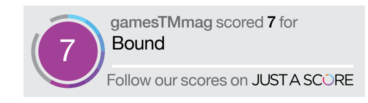
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MOVE TO THE BEAT: It seems like such a simple detail but the fact that the dance moves and music are two mutually exclusive elements of the game really didn't sit right with us. With the two working in tandem, this could have been truly magical.



VERDICT

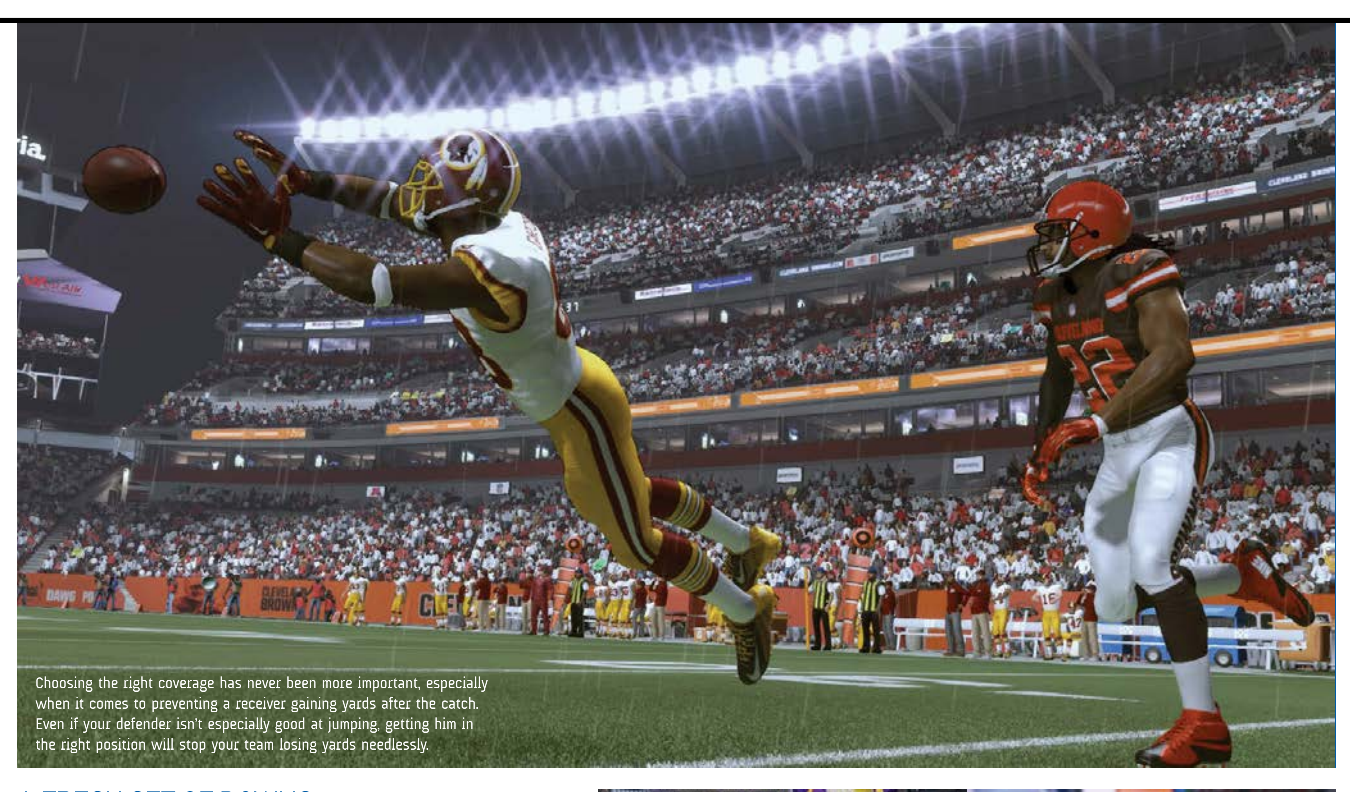
LEAPS GRACEFULLY BUT SLIGHTLY FUMBLES THE LANDING





Above: *Bound*'s photo mode is one of the best we've encountered, with all manner of filters, focus options and tools to remove graphical flourishes and even characters as you agonise over the perfect shot. It's easy to spend more time here than on the main game.




Choosing the right coverage has never been more important, especially when it comes to preventing a receiver gaining yards after the catch. Even if your defender isn't especially good at jumping, getting him in the right position will stop your team losing yards needlessly.

A FRESH SET OF DOWNS

Madden NFL 17

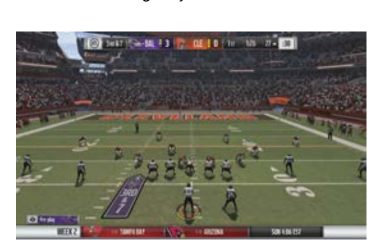
There are few areas in this year's edition of digital gridiron that feel untouched. Visual presentation, animation quality, player intelligence, playbook options and more have been improved over last season. It's taken three iterations, but the drastic redesign that began with *Madden NFL 15* has finally provided fruit. Fans of the series will notice immediate improvements.

Madden NFL 17 makes it easier than ever for newcomers. After an introductory piece of questionably written high-drama in which you play as the LA Rams in the closing moments of a tight match, you're thrown straight into the Skills Trainer and taught the basics of the game and how to make best use of the year's newly added elements. In its demonstration of the difference between a double and triple option, a 3-4 and 4-3 defence and how to perform the essential act of celebrating as you score a touchdown, there's an argument to say the Skills Trainer is the best of all sports game tutorials.

That quality is essential given how complicated the game can be, especially in a pre-play phase that provides more room than ever to customise your approach and detail exactly how you want your players to act. Line up incorrectly, and you're not going to stop many passes to receivers capable of highlighting your tactical deficiencies. Skills Trainer might have taught you the basics, but you must make sure to evolve your learning and adapt to your opponent's tendencies.

On the purely physical side, the running game has been altered to give more options in avoiding and crashing through defenders. Spins, stiff-arms and jukes are all more effective thanks to improved timing making it easier to predict the result of your input, while the option to hurdle over players is as exhilarating as it is prone to causing a fumble. Ultimately, though, it's the enhanced intelligence of the offensive line that makes running the football more satisfying. Linemen push and pull their opposing defenders to create clear gaps wherever possible, with your fullback reacting as the play unfolds to provide genuine protection against any linebackers or defensive ends trying to show off.

This combination between your physical inputs and the ability of the game to read and react to your actions make this the best *Madden* yet and makes us more excited than ever for the future of the franchise. Certainly, it's an early contender for sports game of the year.

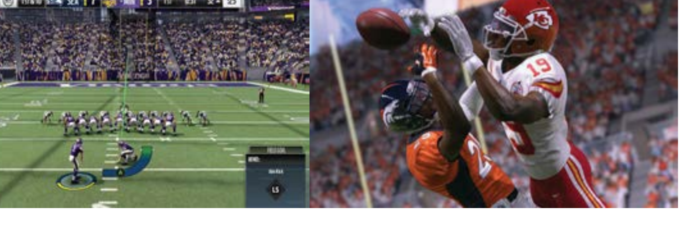


DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-32 Online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
MADDEN NFL 16

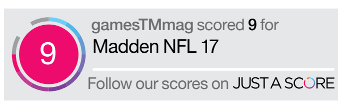

WORSE THAN
NBA 2K16



ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

FAIR PLAY: Unlike previous Madden games, every offensive option comes with a defensive counter. Finally, then, you can concentrate your tactics on offense or defence knowing that you're not at a disadvantage.

VERDICT
BEST COMBO OF IDEAS AND EXECUTION NFL HAS SEEN



GETTING BETTER WITH TIME

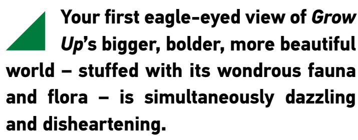
Grow Up

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PlayStation 4
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Reflections
PRICE: £7.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN
GROW HOME

WORSE THAN
JOURNEY



Your first eagle-eyed view of *Grow Up*'s bigger, bolder, more beautiful world – stuffed with its wondrous fauna and flora – is simultaneously dazzling and disheartening.

In the opening hours of this climb-and-collect game, you may feel you'll never reach the dizzying heights teased by the tiny islands suspended high in the atmosphere. Manoeuvring character BUD is like wrestling a shopping cart; deliberately clunky and clumsy, you'll spend a lot of time gritting your teeth as he careers off an island, fails to anchor after a jump or plummets hundreds of meters after losing his footing – sometimes taking your last half hour's progress with him.

This would be okay if scrambling back up was a short trip. It isn't, though – not often, anyway, and certainly not to begin with. But while the opening few hours of the game fall just on the wrong side of frustrating, persevere. It's worth it.

Robot BUD is armed with a sweet, can-do attitude as he hums and purrs to himself like a 56K modem. He's on a mission to locate and reclaim parts of crashed spaceship MOM, as POD – his new flying companion – scouts the debris and other notable items across the planet.

As your exploration deepens and your crystal count increases, so too does BUD's toolset. Eventually you'll be able to drift, glide and roll your way across the world, making exploration not only easier, but infinitely more enjoyable, too.

The Floradex 3000 – BUD's natty backpack, wherein he collects samples of undiscovered plant life – is an interesting addition, but one you'll rarely utilise. Though experimentation is fun (the bouncy Champolines can be stacked, for instance) once your Floradex is full, you'll more likely than not recycle the same tried and tested ones.

Grow Up is short on instruction and high on expectation, perhaps automatically assuming you've accompanied BUD before. The camera floats in and out (as do the clouds) at the most inopportune times, sometimes forcing you into a leap of faith rather than a carefully calculated jump. There's frequent stuttering, most typically when you're excavating crystals, which can be infuriating if you're clinging precariously to the side of a chasm.

But the more time you invest in BUD's exploration – the more crystals you yank, the more floraforms you discover – the more delightful the journey. So while the opening few hours are an exercise in patience, the game unfurls into a smart, challenging exploratory puzzle game that's always testing and teasing you in a bid to climb just a little bit higher or complete just one more POD challenge (worth it for the bee costume alone).

Grow Up may not deviate wildly from its predecessor, but we're okay with that; BUD's new toys not only invite exploration of this bigger, bolder world – they demand it.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MY BUDDY: Despite his clumsy bumbling, there's something special about the chittering and skittering of our kid BUD. Complete POD Challenges and unlock alternate costumes for added adorableness.





Above: Don't look down, don't look down, don't look down… it's too late, we looked down **Below:** Unlock Telerouters to fast travel your way across the planet. The higher the better!

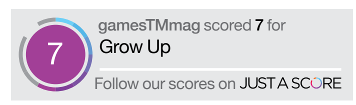


Above: Great strides have been made to tighten up gameplay compared to the original game.



VERDICT

STICK WITH IT – IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT!



WIDE OF THE MARX

The Tomorrow Children



Above: Its unique and unsettling visual style is appealing at first, but the thick Vaseline-smear depth of field soon becomes obnoxious. The game certainly has style on its side, but it doesn't do an awful lot with it.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Q-Games
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



It's not entirely clear whether *The Tomorrow Children* is playable political commentary on communism or merely proof that the ideology really doesn't work in videogame form. For it to have a chance of succeeding, you at least need a community worth supporting and a vision of how it might grow – two key factors that are extremely limited here. The former is impossible with the game's bizarre net code, which sees citizens pop in and out sporadically, and without being able to see the constant busywork of others, your own feels less gratifying. As for the latter point, minimal options and potential for town improvement mean that no matter how much you put in, there's still only so much each area can grow to reflect the efforts of its citizens. So with no community spirit beyond what you enforce yourself by playing with friends and no endgame beyond some slightly better looking buildings, the grind of running menial task after menial task simply never feels worth the effort.

'Laborious' is absolutely the right word for what *The Tomorrow Children* presents as gameplay, because it *is* work. You'll mine for a few different kinds of resources, run on treadmills to generate power, solve tedious tile puzzles to add generic buildings to your generic town… the closest the game lets you get to actual fun is when blasting the strange B-movie beasties that periodically make moves on your homestead but even then, it's all so stodgy and unsatisfying that it actively works against the experience – it's a reminder that you're playing a videogame and that blasting monsters is an itch that countless other games are far better equipped to scratch. It must be said that there is something oddly cathartic to the general gameplay loop, but the same can be said of all manner of F2P games, making *The Tomorrow Children* something we'd suggest at least trying when it does eventually go free-to-play (current paid users can actually spend in-game currency on F2P invites for friends, which is a pretty neat move) but right now, the cycle of tedious tasks makes it hard to recommend spending money on.



MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

FOR THE MOTHERLAND: For a game where everything is for the good of the state rather than personal gain, there's minimal sense of satisfaction to be gained from the limited city growth. Perhaps that's the point, but if it is, it's clumsily made.

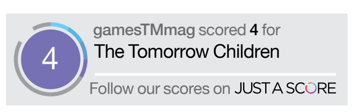
And even when it does go free-to-play, spending might not be something that is easy to avoid. Coupons, the primary in-game currency needed to replace tools, are rationed based on how hard you toil, making it hard to generate a respectable balance. Freeman Dollars, meanwhile, can be used to pick up useful perks, building blocks and far more durable tools, although this secondary currency is extremely rare in the game itself. While it might be a communism simulator at heart, its roots in capitalism couldn't be much more obvious, obnoxious or off-message.

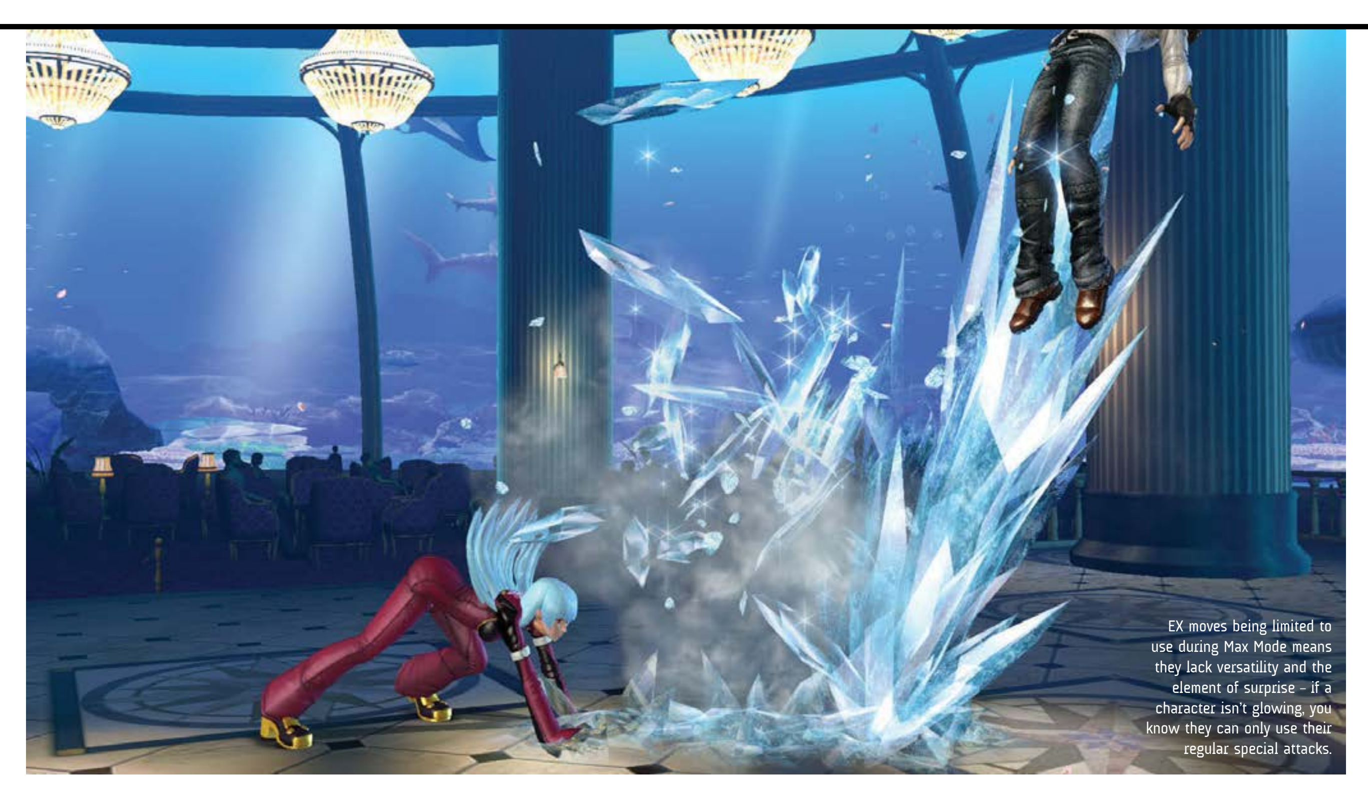


Above: Grinding without any payoff is part of the game's message, although that isn't to say that it works well in videogame format. It doesn't.



IN SOVIET RUSSIA, GAME PLAYS YOU

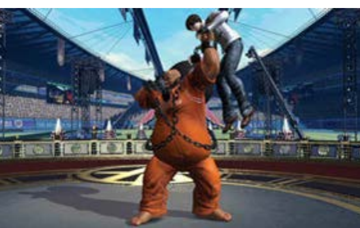




EX moves being limited to use during Max Mode means they lack versatility and the element of surprise – if a character isn't glowing, you know they can only use their regular special attacks.

THE BAD ART OF FIGHTING

King Of Fighters XIV



For a while there, it looked as though SNK's comeback was going to be a disaster. Polygons have been famously unkind to the *King Of Fighters* series over the years and especially coming off the back of *XIII*'s absolutely beautiful sprite work, seeing what looked like bad fan renders in the initial reveal was nauseating. Credit where credit's due, SNK put in a lot of work in the months that followed on that front and while we're still no fans of the models or the style, it's only fair to commend the team for how much the game improved visually between announcement and release.

Auto-combos, improved tutorials and relatively simple mechanics are all perfect to guide newcomers comfortably into the action, while experts will find a level of the depth to combat thanks to the refined Max Mode – a universal cancel that slowly drains a full bar of meter while allowing access to EX special moves, although gating these off in such a way does feel a little limiting. Max Mode has the knock-on effect of directly impacting character balance, since those with great EX moves and combo potential while it's active are terrifying when sat on a couple of stocks – Mature's pressure game is pretty much peerless during Max Mode, for instance.

The roster is a curious array of returning and original fighters, the latter making up a surprising portion of the cast. There are some real oddballs in there both in terms of design and play styles, although some of the wackier ones might just be a step too far. Yes, Sylvie Paula Paula, we're looking at you. A number of popular fighters are lost to the series' ludicrously convoluted canon or just otherwise forgotten, with the likes of Vanessa, Hwa, Yamazaki and Blue Mary absent and news that Rock Howard's glorious return was considered but not followed through on is sad indeed. Still, there are plenty of interesting new characters so it's not all bad – it might just take a little time to scout for suitable replacements for your team.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Deep Silver
DEVELOPER: SNK
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

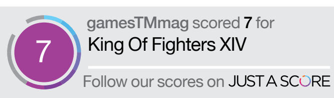
LOOKING GOOD: While it's clearly a lot more work, the beautiful hand-drawn characters of the last few King Of Fighters games were absolutely gorgeous and we much prefer that style – the 2.5D approach has been done so well by Arc with the new Guilty Gear.

The modest serving of solo content is backed up by arguably the strongest online component in a King Of Fighters game to date, meaning there's plenty to do whether you want to bang your head against Trials or put your skills to the test against real players.

KOF XIV is merely good rather than great, which is disappointing from so storied a franchise as this, but competition is fierce these days – Arc is on fire, NetherRealm is a real contender and *Street Fighter V* continues to improve. *XIV* suggests that SNK is struggling to find its form, but it'll need to find it in order to dethrone the current beat-'em-up royalty.

VERDICT

A SOLID AND WELCOME RETURN



THE ARAGAMI KILLER

God Eater 2: Rage Burst



There's been a distinct Rathalos-shaped hole in the PlayStation library ever since *Monster Hunter Tri* made the jump to Wii and while Capcom's series continues to serve the hunting needs of those with Nintendo platforms, the battle rages on to find a proper replacement on Sony devices. Vita has had a great run in this regard – *Soul Sacrifice*, *Toukiden* and *Freedom Wars* are all great – but the only option on PS4 so far is the port of *Toukiden* update, *Kiwami*. While another upscaled handheld game is unlikely to change the landscape that much, options are never a bad thing.

While *Monster Hunter Generations* sees the barrier dropped to an all-time low, pretenders to the throne continue to revel in complexity. Even to hunting veterans, the amount of stats and customisation here will be somewhat daunting at first. Each weapon has multiple forms and can be tweaked in different ways, including a complex and surprisingly deep ammo customisation – whether you want a steady stream of elemental fire or a complex bouncing (and repeatedly exploding) shot, it's simply a case of piecing ammo parts together and setting how it will behave, although larger, more complex variants will be more expensive to use in the field.



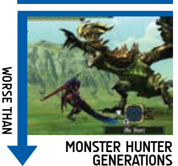
DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED: PS4
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Bandai Namco
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

RAGNAROK ODYSSEY ACE





MONSTER HUNTER GENERATIONS

WORSE THAN

That's not something you need to concern yourself with too much until difficulty starts to ramp up, however, since the various melee tools (along with the Devour ability of each weapon) are more often than not enough to get the job done. Each type – striking, piercing and so on – proves more effective on different breakable parts of bosses, meaning there's a lot of research or practice to be done if you want to get the most loot per run and in turn, improve your gear as quickly as possible.

While structurally similar to *Monster Hunter*, there's far more of an emphasis on story here than there has been in any of Capcom's hunting games. Your tastes will dictate whether that's a good or a bad thing – while the oddly-dressed anime stereotypes don't spin a bad yarn here, it certainly slows things down enough to be frustrating when a cutscene does little more than remind you that one of the characters really likes sandwiches.

FINGERPRINT

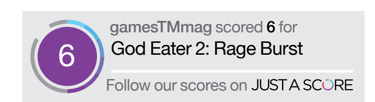
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ARC LIFE: The God Arc is a versatile weapon, able to switch between various ranged and melee modes based on how you prefer to play. It also houses a third feature – the ability to summon a beastly maw to chomp on enemies in order to get buffs, materials

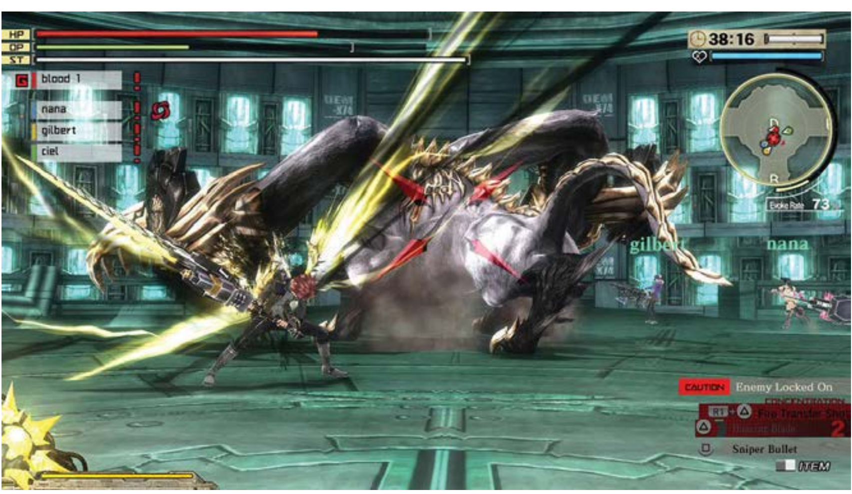
Like most of its brethren, *God Eater* is a fair substitute for the 'real deal' that is *Monster Hunter* but one that doesn't quite stack up to the best-in-class hunters. It's worth noting that the European version also comes with *Resurrection* (a port of the original game), whereas the two are available separately on the US store – at just $20, *Resurrection* alone is a more attractive proposition, especially since its sequel doesn't add an awful lot. While *Toukiden* is still king of the hunt on PS4, anyone looking for something that deviates from the 'traditional' hunting format or those who wouldn't mind a little more JRPG flavour may find a suitable replacement here.

VERDICT

A SERVICEABLE MONSTER HUNTER SUBSTITUTE







Left: Those who care more about hunting than story aren't especially well served here, as the curious cast of characters takes every opportunity to chat about something or other.



THIS CADET STILL NEEDS TRAINING

This Is The Police

If there's one glaring issue with *This Is The Police*, it's that it lacks a little finesse. Not the worst crime for an indie developer to commit, you might think. Smaller teams and smaller budgets might logically lead to some rough edges and cut corners. But when you play the game and imagine what it could have been, how close Weappy Studio came to making something really interesting, it begins to feel much more like a horribly fumbled opportunity.

The trouble stems largely from a conflict of two warring features of the game and a cognitive barrier that many seasoned gamers will need to adjust to as they play. The conflict is between the narrative-driven, corrupt police department story and the choice-driven police management sim that *This Is The Police* attempts to combine. Each should be trying to inform and give weight to the other, but really they just clash. The grizzled chief you play as has troubles at home, old friends getting caught up in scandals and is being forced out by the mayor. A promising start, mixing a little *Breaking Bad* with some *Serpico*.

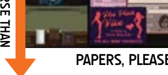
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Belarus
PUBLISHER: Nordic Games, EuroVideo Medien
DEVELOPER: Weappy Studio
PRICE: £13.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows XP 32, Dual Core CPU, 2 GB RAM, Geforce 7800, AMD HD 4600, Intel HD3000 or similiar, DirectX 9.0, 5 GB available space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS

VA-11 HALL-A





PAPERS, PLEASE

WORSE THAN



Above: The management system of the game is simple and sometimes quite challenging as you must weigh up the quality and number of staff you have available against the possibility of more incident reports coming in. Can you juggle all the cases?

Then you have the choice-based mechanics of the police management portion of the game, which are actually pretty solid, if a little repetitive. Having a scripted character can heavily colour what you *think* the game is telling you it wants you to do, but the game is actually pretty open to your decisions, allowing you to take on and ignore dictates from city hall or the mafia as you see fit.

And this brings up that cognitive issue, which is that as gamers we've been trained to want to win, sometimes at all costs. The mix of narrative structure and choice mechanics can sometimes imply a fail state to certain scenarios, many of which you might find objectionable on ethical, moral or political grounds, but no such state exists. When the demands are sometimes motivated by blatant prejudices it can feel as if the game is telling you to do something abhorrent, but you can just say no. Whether or not that chimes with the chief character you're supposed to be role-playing gets pushed aside.

And you know what, that should be a really interesting and engaging conundrum to force players into, but by giving us a half-story to build from we're left having to guess at what Weappy's intentions with this game really are. *This Is The Police* appears to be trying to present the life of a police chief – with all the nastiness and the inhumanity that cops have to face every day – without commentary. But its use of narrative structure undermines that purity of vision. It either needed more story or less, because the core game is solid, if uninspired.

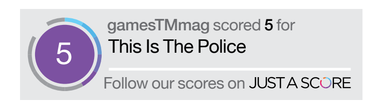
MISSING LINK

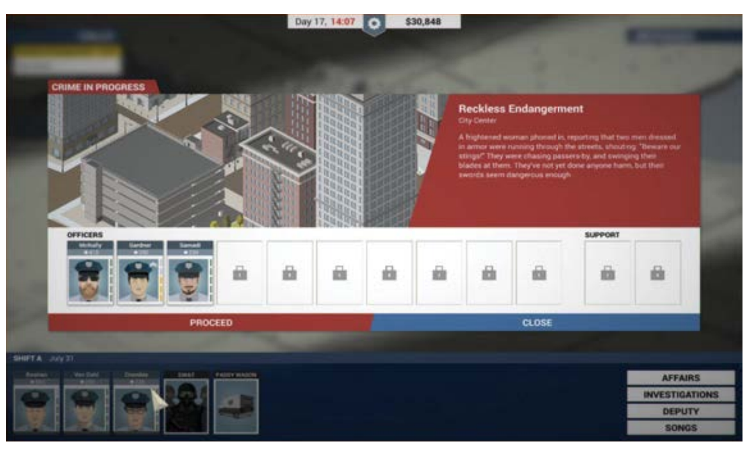
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

PICK A LANE: There was an opportunity here to make an interesting city management sim with a crime focus or a gripping, choice-driven corruption tale. Neither is served by trying to do both.

VERDICT

A CLASH OF APPROACHES THAT DOESN'T QUITE WORK



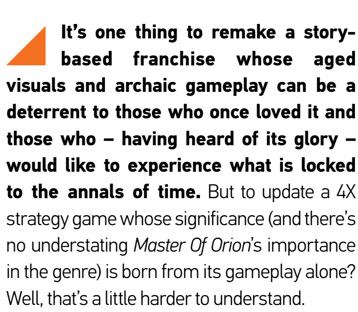


Below: The narrative promises to be interesting, but really becomes rather monotonous, not helped by some rather cheesy performances of the dialogue that makes the game feel as if it should be set in 1945, not 1985.



CAPTAIN'S SLOG

Master Of Orion



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Argentina
PUBLISHER: WG Labs
DEVELOPER: NGD Studios
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
MINIMUM SPEC: 64-bit OS, 2.0GHz Dual Core CPU, 2GB RAM, 512MB GPU, 15GB Hard Drive space
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN: MASTER OF ORION

WORSE THAN: GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS III

It's one thing to remake a story-based franchise whose aged visuals and archaic gameplay can be a deterrent to those who once loved it and those who – having heard of its glory – would like to experience what is locked to the annals of time. But to update a 4X strategy game whose significance (and there's no understating *Master Of Orion*'s importance in the genre) is born from its gameplay alone? Well, that's a little harder to understand.

Rather than create a fully-fledged sequel, then, we're given a shinier, more modern equivalent in this remake – and all the criticisms that befall such a sentence. There are few new ideas, with much of the rework being focused on interface, on the visuals and on making things a little simpler to understand. Make no mistake, that's a critical upgrade for a retro strategy game like *MOO*; there's little bothering with menus and more time spent making decisions and guiding units about the galaxy. A positive, no doubt, but where the likes of *Civilization V* reduced arbitrary clutter but maintained a large portion of its depth, it seems a modern equivalent of *Master Of Orion* struggles to achieve the same success.

Of course a lot of what remained great about the original remains true here, with tactical decisions and careful faction management being the most important. Add in the graphical flair – which is admittedly really quite pleasant – and a heavier focus on cinematics and there's scope for anyone other than diehard 4X or *MOO* fans to get on board. But when that is the biggest improvement on an older, reputed title, it's the severe lack of gameplay changes that stands out the most.

Perhaps it's an unfair comparison to make, but the years since the original has seen a considerable number of genre improvements – not just in the 4X arena but even in space-based macromanagement games. *Galactic Civilizations III* has proven that it's possible to utilise a beloved and familiar name while modernising its gameplay, while the likes of *Stellaris* are proving that it's possible to maintain that classic style of play without needing the backing of such a prestigious heritage.

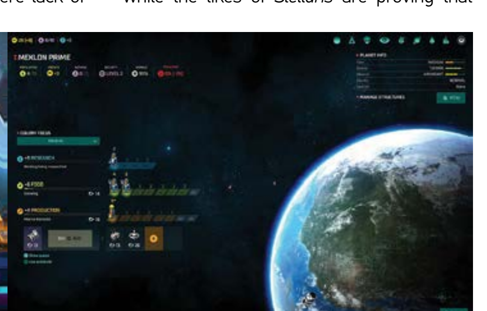
But even so, in spite of the remake's potential and of the comparisons of its contemporaries, the real criticism comes from the fact that *Master Of Orion* simply fails to achieve the one thing it needs to: replayability. Perhaps we were blind to it when *MOO* was novel, but in the here and now this modern version simply doesn't have the variety of gameplay to maintain repeated playthroughs – the cardinal sin of any 4X game. The planets may shift around, the different races might have varied advantages, but it'll all play out exactly the same from game to game. That this remake isn't capable of sucking hours of your life is perhaps its biggest downfall.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

DEEP SPACE: Modernising an important title is a noble cause, but that means more than new graphics and sounds – the gameplay needs to follow suit and maintain an equal level of depth, not only to its competitors, but its heritage.

Above: The randomised galaxies don't really do much for the game's replayability. You'd have to self-impose some specific play restrictions if you were to get any prolonged entertainment out of the game.

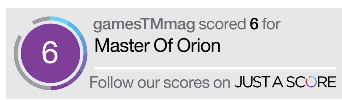


Above: The game at least maintains a good bit of character about it.



VERDICT

A REMAKE IN ALL THE WRONG WAYS





> "We didn't know whether we were going to die, losing everything we had collected"

AGOSTINO SIMONETTA, EMEA REGIONAL LEAD, ID@XBOX



WHY I ♥...

ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED

AGOSTINO SIMONETTA, EMEA REGIONAL LEAD, ID@XBOX

There's this one game – well, it has been more the experience, really – but this game, Ark: Survival Evolved. *It has provided some of my best gaming moments ever.*

Me and a couple of friends – I was probably only level five or six and my friends had just started – we decided to cross from an island over to a beach. We had a few bits and bobs, you know, clothes and torches, and we cross this river without realising it was the end of the day.

One of us dies in the water, but we make it to the other side of the island – there was nothing there, we expected to find all sorts of things. So we spent the night, I was the only one able to make a fire, but there was no wood. We were chatting online for hours, and it really felt like one of those magic moments; we were scared, you know, because we couldn't cross the river again – we didn't know whether we were going to die, losing everything we had collected. It was one of those moments that, between the three of us, we will always remember. That's a gaming moment I love.

RETRO

NO.179



90
RETRO GUIDE TO…
BUBBLE BOBBLE
As Bub and Bob celebrate 30 years of gaming history, we take a look back at some of the pair's greatest moments

BEHIND THE SCENES
96 **SPYRO THE DRAGON**
The original development team tells us how they managed to pull together one of the greatest platformers of the PlayStation era

INTERVIEW
102 **JULLIAN GOLLOP**
The creator of *X-Com* reflects on what it means to have made one of the most influential games of all time and tells us what he has planned next

GAME CHANGERS
106 **BURNOUT**
It's been 15 years since this action racer brought new life and new meaning to the genre. We break down how it impacted the industry for years to come

DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**

THE RETRO GUIDE TO…

BUBBLE BOBBLE

Taito's magical franchise is celebrating its 30th anniversary. **games™** delves into the cave of wonders and revisits Bub and Bob's greatest adventures

WHEN FUKIO MITSUJI created *Bubble Bobble* in 1986, he crafted the beginnings of a coin-op legacy that would go on to outlast its own creator (he sadly passed away in 2008). After cutting his teeth on quirky releases such as *Halley's Comet*, Mitsuji created an intricately-designed arcade game that was rich in gameplay and awash with deep secrets. An instant hit in the arcades and later, on home computers and consoles, *Bubble Bobble* turned into one of Taito's flagship games and a slew of sequels followed.

Unravelling the actual series can be rather tricky, namely thanks to several rather confusing titles, it's not always clear which game is the true sequel to Taito's 1986 hit. It doesn't help that so-called conversions are actually anything but, either sharing little, if anything, in common with the game they are based on. Then there's *Bubble Bobble*'s heroes, Bub and Bob, who are either humans, dinosaurs, dinosaurs that have been changed into humans or humans wearing dinosuits, depending on which version of the game you play.

If *Bubble Bobble*'s sporadic story and back catalogue leaves you a little confused, the gameplay (for the most part) has always been consistent and variations of *Bubble Bobble*, *Rainbow Islands* and spin-off series *Puzzle Bobble* can be found on most generations of consoles. So join us, then, as we go on a magical journey to discover the many, varied games that makes up this great franchise.

BUBBLE BOBBLE 1986

ARCADE, VARIOUS

The concept behind Taito's excellent arcade game is as simplistic as its bouncy soundtrack is joyous. Enemies appear onscreen in strategically-placed locations and run rampant, the player, as a magically-enhanced dinosaur, must attempt to trap them by blowing bubbles. Once an enemy is encapsulated, it can be burst, where it will then turn into an item of food you can consume for bonus points. Bursting multiple enemies at once grants better drops, including special items that can cause you to skip levels, and it's possible to bounce on bubbles to reach out-of-the-way areas or otherwise inaccessible bonuses.

Bursting with secrets (many of which didn't appear in the home conversions) and blessed with a fantastic co-operative mode, *Bubble Bobble* is as playable today as when we first encountered it in a smoky arcade on Poole Quay. Fun fact: *Bubble Bobble* is one of the first games to feature multiple endings if certain criteria are met.





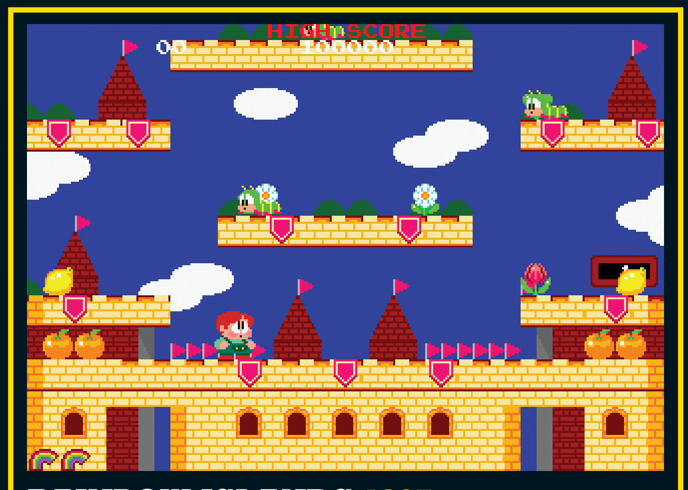




FINAL BUBBLE BOBBLE 1988

MASTER SYSTEM

Bubble Bobble's immense popularity meant it received a large number of home ports to various home consoles and computers. We're focusing on the Master System version for several reasons, and not just because it was ported by Taito and features all of the same secrets found in the original arcade game (although that's a pretty good reason). While there's a fair amount of flicker at times, all 100 levels of the original game are present and correct. *Final Bubble Bobble* goes one step further, however, adding 100 additional levels that are unlocked by finding three secret rooms and collecting the diamonds found within. While many of the rooms are copies of the originals with new enemy layouts, there are additional bosses to battle (some of which are exclusive to this version) and new items to discover. It also boasts a handy password option.



RAINBOW ISLANDS 1987

ARCADE, VARIOUS

It lacks multiplayer, but *Rainbow Islands* is still an excellent sequel to *Bubble Bobble*. Visually, it's far superior, featuring even brighter, colourful graphics and vertically-scrolling stages. Rainbows are used to trap enemies and up to three can be hurled once the relevant power-ups have been acquired. Some of the stages are based on classic Taito games and it features another cleverly convoluted array of secrets, many of which didn't make it across to the home versions of the time. Sadly the game's remix of *Over The Rainbow* didn't make it into later versions.





BUBBLE BOBBLE 1991

GAME BOY

We're not massively impressed with the miniaturised version of *Bubble Bobble*. Realising that a single-screen game would look ridiculous on the Game Boy's tiny display, Taito wisely moved to scrolling levels instead, which are roughly similar to the ones featured in the original arcade game. It's not the greatest of trade-offs however, as it's all too easy for enemies to surprise you, which results in you losing a life. Another annoying aspect of Game Boy *Bubble Bobble* is that the excellent multiplayer mode is missing, which is quite surprising considering how many games made excellent use of the link-up cable at the time.



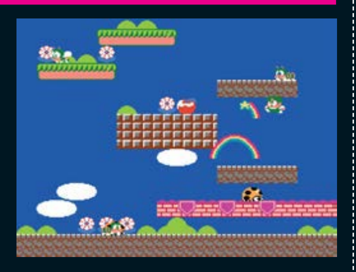
PARASOL STARS 1991

PC ENGINE, VARIOUS

Although it followed on from *Rainbow Islands*, *Parasol Stars* did not receive an arcade release, instead debuting on the PC Engine. Like *Rainbow Islands*, it features varied colourful worlds, but the mode of attack is very different, with Bub and Bob being equipped with versatile parasols. In addition to being used as a shield, the parasol can also stun enemies, capture elemental droplets, hurl enemies or be used as a handy parachute. Like *Bubble Bobble*, the action is confined to a single screen, but the levels are more varied in their design. In addition to catching droplets and hurling them at enemies, five can be held at once to create a more powerful attack. While the 16-bit home computers received impressive ports, **Retro Gamer** revealed that the 8-bit versions were destroyed by the freelancer's ex-wife.







RAINBOW ISLANDS: THE STORY OF BUBBLE BOBBLE 2 1991

NES, MASTER SYSTEM

Confusingly, there are actually two different versions of *Rainbow Islands* on the NES. The one we're focusing on here also came out on Sega's Master System and it's more of a standalone game. While it shares similar themes to the arcade game and features the same music, the gameplay is quite different, due to the weird scrolling on display, which sometimes shunts you up at inopportune times. You also only have access to two rainbows, which greatly affects how you approach enemies and there are additional bonuses that unlock if you collect all the available diamonds. It's a decent game, but features weedy sprites and annoying difficulty spikes in places. Interestingly, the *Rainbow Islands* that appeared on NES in UK was developed by Ocean Software and is far closer to the arcade original with more authentic visuals and level layouts.

BUBBLE SYMPHONY 1994

ARCADE, SATURN

This sterling effort from Taito was the first to drastically build upon the original *Bubble Bobble* mechanics. Whilst it remains a two-player game, there are now four dragons, each with unique abilities. Bubblun is an all-rounder, Bobblun has speedier bubbles, but a shorter range, Kululun has great range but a slow fire rate, while Cororon has the fastest fire rate. Each dino also has unique attacks when the fire button is held down. It's otherwise business as usual with vastly improved graphics, a new score system based around collecting and combining different musical notes and multiple routes throughout the game. Originally available on Sega's Saturn it was eventually ported to *Taito Legends 2* in 2006.





"EACH DINO HAS UNIQUE ATTACKS WHEN THE FIRE BUTTON IS HELD DOWN"

PUZZLE BOBBLE 1994

ARCADE, NEO-GEO

This isn't a true sequel, but it's such a significant game that it deserves to be included here. Also known as *Bust-A-Move*, *Puzzle Bobble* is a fast-paced take on the 'match 3' genre where you must burst bubbles by connecting three or more of the same colour. As time passes, the wall of bubbles drop down, given you less and less time to clear the remaining bubbles. While the single-player mode is relatively entertaining, thanks to the large number of different configurations that must be cleared, it's the competitive multiplayer mode where *Puzzle Bobble* truly comes alive.

Like *Bubble Bobble*, *Puzzle Bobble* also has an intricate (although not quite as complicated) scoring system, with more points being awarded if you cause dropped bubbles to fall rather than simply popping them. You can also bounce your bubble off walls, to hopefully hit certain other coloured bubbles and amass more points. Aesthetically styled on *Bubble Bobble*, it became a huge success that has received countless sequels and updates over the years.



BUBBLE MEMORIES 1996

ARCADE

Despite coming out after *Bubble Symphony*, this is a massive disappointment. Its aesthetics are more basic, the power-up charge bubble is nowhere near as strong and the additional dinos and special abilities are completely absent. It does maintain the same elemental bubbles that first appeared in *Bubble Symphony* but its scoring system feels nowhere near as sophisticated as its predecessor. A disappointing sequel with the one bonus that your charge bubble now captures multiple enemies.

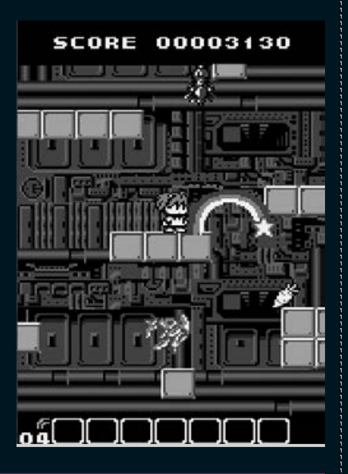




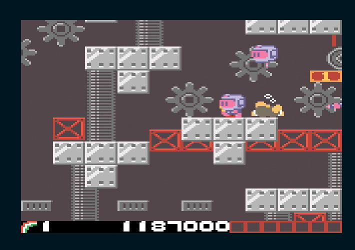
RAINBOW ISLANDS: PUTTY'S PARTY 2000

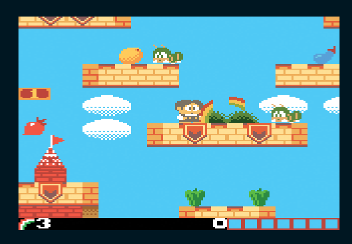
WONDERSWAN

This interesting effort never made it outside of Japan. Unlike other versions of *Rainbow Islands* it shows you the entire level before you start, it also replaces Bub and Bob with a little girl called Putty, uses the Wonderswan's vertical mode to show you more of the playing area and lets you tackle the first four islands in any order. Sadly, it's quite sluggish to play, meaning it's all too easy to get hit by enemies. A curious oddity and nothing more.



"IT'S QUITE SLUGGISH TO PLAY, MEANING IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO GET HIT BY ENEMIES"

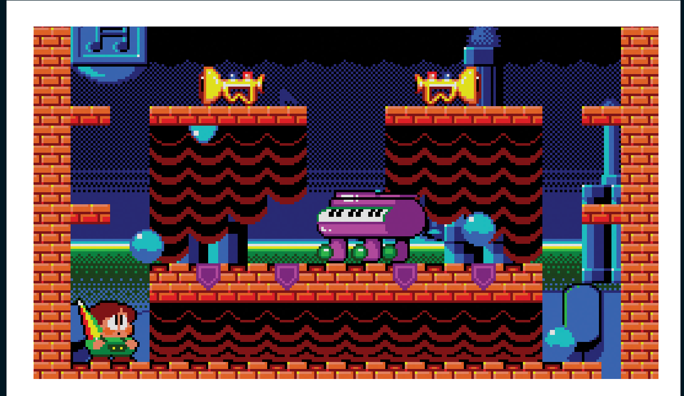




RAINBOW ISLANDS 2001

GAME BOY COLOR

The Game Boy Color version of *Rainbow Islands* shares DNA with the NES and Master System versions, but has plenty of differences to warrant its own inclusion here. The biggest change is that it's now possible to choose which of the first six islands you start on. Oh, and it scrolls left and right too to make up for the system's tiny screen. Additionally, it features four additional islands, greatly improved visuals that are more in line with the arcade game and the original *Bubble Bobble* theme tune. It also adds plenty of additional replay value by adding score and time attack modes.



PORTING PARASOL STARS

Mick West looks back at his stellar Amiga and Atari ST conversion

How did you get involved with programming the Amiga and Atari ST versions of *Parasol Stars*?

I was working at Ocean, and had just done an Amiga/ST game called *Darkman* (based on the film). So I think it was largely that I was available at the time, and had experience doing platform games.

Were you familiar with the game before you started working on it?

I was a big fan of both *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, however, I'd not played *Parasol Stars* before.

What gameplay reference did you use for programming the game seeing as there was no actual arcade version?

We used the PC engine version… at the time nobody seemed sure if there was an arcade version or not, or if there was one planned. I think we had a PC Engine in the office for a while at that point, people would import Japanese games. We had played *Bomberman* in the office, but *Parasol Stars* was the first time I played with it a lot.

Was it a case of playing through the game trying to copy the graphics and gameplay? Did you use any sprite conversion techniques or have to do the graphics from scratch?

We got the sprites in some ASCII format from Taito, but that's it. No documentation, no help at all. We had to convert them from 16 colours for each sprite to a fixed 16-colour palette. I wrote a tool to semi-automate that. The actual level layout and the gameplay had to be figured out by playing through the game multiple times, and watching videos.

Were there any difficulties technically converting it because of the amount of sprites, scrolling, and all the little Easter Eggs and secrets?

More so on the Atari ST version, due to the lack of hardware sprites and scrolling. On the Amiga we used hardware sprites for Bub and Bob, and with the hardware scrolling and more colours it made it way better than the ST version. We did have problems trying to figure out the logic behind how the various power-ups would appear. The algorithm by which the stars appeared was a bit of a mystery, and they seemed a bit random. We asked Taito what it was, but they did not reply, so I had to make it up. We also had problems with having only a single button on the joystick. The PC Engine version used one button to jump, and the other to activate the parasol, and pressing D-pad up would put the parasol up. But we had to use D-pad up to jump, so we used down to put the parasol up, and let it stay up if you did up-down to jump. That worked very well when you got used to it.





BUBBLE BOBBLE OLD AND NEW 2002

GAME BOY ADVANCE

At the time of release this was the most accurate way of playing Taito's classic game on the move. It's not quite arcade perfect as the GBA's screen resolution meant some slight scrolling was needed to ensure it kept the original arcade's ratio. A zoom mode is included but it greatly cuts down the graphics, making everything look ugly and blocky. It remains an excellent conversion however and it's even possible to play a two-player game without the need of a second copy of the game. You lose the soundtrack, but it's a small price to pay. Sadly, this 'New' version of *Bubble Bobble* is rather more pedestrian being nothing more than a graphical update that looks even worse when zoomed in. For shame, Taito.

BUBBLE BOBBLE REVOLUTION 2005

NINTENDO DS

Imagine creating an updated version of *Bubble Bobble* for the DS that enhanced the graphics, added effects such as blowing into the DS's microphone to activate screens and spread the action across two screens. Now imagine adding a game-breaking bug that left out the level 30 boss, meaning you couldn't progress any further and stopped you from reaching final 70 levels. It sounds odd, but that's what actually happened with *Bubble Bobble Revolution*. The silver lining to this is that it meant you only had to endure 30 terribly bland levels, mind.



RAINBOW ISLANDS REVOLUTION 2005

NINTENDO DS

Many DS games had unwanted touch controls in order to justify their appearance on the handheld and this pitiful effort from Ignition Entertainment was no exception. Conceptually, it's a solid idea, with Bub trapped in a bubble and continually floating upwards. The player must guide Bub around hazards, touching the screen to create rainbows that will stop enemies. It's also possible to touch rainbows which will cause them to fall, killing any enemies they come into contact with. In addition to drawing rainbows, the player can also draw specific shapes, which will create more powerful rainbows that can cause even more damage.

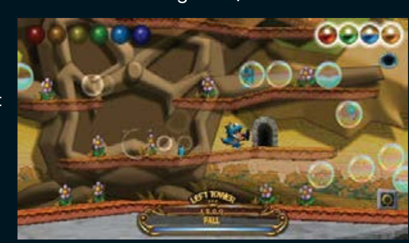


Sadly, despite being an interesting take on the series, poor and unresponsive controls make it a real struggle to play and it won't be long before you're damning both your DS and Ignition Entertainment for releasing it in the first place.

BUBBLE BOBBLE EVOLUTION 2006

PSP

While we applaud developer Opus for trying to take the *Bubble Bobble* franchise in a brand-new direction, we'll also loudly boo them with a side order of 'you're crap' for making such a terrible game. *Evolution* has you traversing cylindrical towers by flipping switches and using elemental bubbles to gain access to otherwise impassable areas. Levels are poorly designed; the controls lack the fluidness of earlier games; the music is nauseatingly awful, while the graphics capture none of the cuteness found in the original game. A solid enough concept executed with all the grace of a rhino gatecrashing a party for gazelles. It doesn't even have the decency to include the arcade original.



A LASTING LEGACY

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE LATE FUKIO MITSUJI'S CAREER



HALLEY'S COMET

ARCADE

Here, you defend the Solar System from Halley's Comet. A sequel, *Halley Wars*, appeared in 1991.



SYVALION

ARCADE

This 1988 shooter had you playing as a multi-segmented dragon. It was ported to the SNES and Sharp X68000.



DARIUS II

ARCADE

Spread across three screens, this fish-themed shoot-'em-up allows for massive panoramic vistas and imposing bosses.



VOLFIED

ARCADE

A successor to *Qix* that updated the basic look of the 1981 classic, while also adding numerous power-ups into the mix.



MAGICAL PUZZLE POPILS

GAME GEAR

This was a Game Gear-exclusive and had you trying to reach a Princess in as few steps as possible.



RAINBOW ISLANDS EVOLUTION 2007

PSP

Hate is a strong term to use, but we hate virtually every aspect of this amazingly soulless update by Marvelous Interactive. While the company should be praised for reintroducing the Hurdy-Gurdy back into everyone's lives, the classic musical instrument is the only good thing about the developer's mediocre platformer.

Everything about *Evolution* is awful. The controls are stodgy and unresponsive, meaning you often lose precious lives through no fault of your own. The level design is exceedingly naff too. While we admit that the ability to jump back and forth between three sets of Islands is a novel idea, the transitions are incredibly tedious and it simply ends up making the gameplay too confusing for its own good. Boss fights are dull affairs, too, thanks to unimaginative attack patterns and ropy collision detection, while the additional game modes add little to the overall gameplay.

In fact, if we're honest, the only thing we didn't despise is the batshit crazy story, which sees Bub and Bob taking on an evil record company with rather hilarious results. It's certainly not good enough to justify experiencing the game, though.



BUBBLE BOBBLE PLUS!/NEO 2009

WII, XBOX 360

This instalment was something of a turning point for the series and represents the first time that a *Bubble Bobble* game didn't receive a physical release. It's also one of the first of several Taito arcade updates which featured additional paid DLC to expand on the original content (others being *Arkanoid Plus* and *Puzzle Bobble! Plus*).

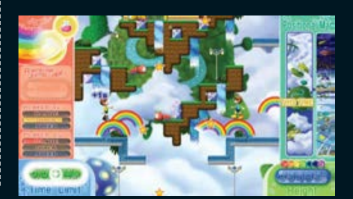
The main game is another authentic representation of the arcade original with all its tricks and secrets present and correct, meaning there are 100 levels to fight your way through. That's not all though. There is also a brand-new arranged mode that adds another 100 levels to fight through, and it supports four players, as well as additional 'Super' versions of the stages. Another new mode is Versus where all four characters are bombarded by an endless supply of enemies and must survive for as long as possible. The two DLC packs added an additional 100 stages between them.

RAINBOW ISLANDS: TOWERING ADVENTURE 2009

WII, XBOX 360

This is a truly ugly game with dull backdrops and offensive-looking character designs that completely fail to capture the spirit of the arcade original. Despite this, it's worth having a dalliance with, as Taito has at least attempted to reinvent the classic gameplay, turning it into a rather slick time-attack game that becomes surprisingly addictive once you look past its characterless veneer. Unlike earlier *Rainbow Islands* games, getting hit by enemies doesn't cost you a life, instead you lose valuable seconds that must be clawed back by trapping enemies in your rainbows. It's actually a really clever twist on the standard formula and makes it far more chaotic and fun as a result, although it still comes nowhere close to the brilliance of the arcade original (which sadly isn't hidden away anywhere). Originally released on Nintendo's WiiWare service, the later Xbox Live release allowed you to use your Avatar in the Time Attack and Challenge modes, which was nice.





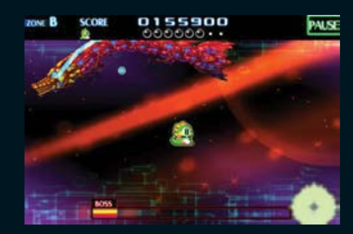
"TAITO HAS ATTEMPTED TO REINVENT THE CLASSIC GAMEPLAY, TURNING IT INTO A SLICK TIME-ATTACK GAME"

BUBBLE BOBBLE DOUBLE 2010

IOS

As its name suggests, *Bubble Bobble Double* is actually two games in one. The first is an incredibly authentic port of the arcade original, which is slightly let down by its heavy reliance on touch controls. It also loses out by being set in a tiny window, making for some eye-straining gameplay. The second half of the game is more befitting for a 2010 touchscreen game and has you shooting down waves of enemies as they approach your static dino. One touch traps them; a second destroys them, with chain reactions offering point bonuses. Sadly, it's nowhere near as fun as it sounds.





MORE BUBBLE BOBBLE TO TRY

- RAINBOW ISLANDS EXTRA, 1988, ARCADE
- RAINBOW ISLANDS: BUBBLE BOBBLE 2, 1988, NES
- BUBBLE BOBBLE PART 2, 1993, NES
- BUBBLE BOBBLE JR, 1993, GAME BOY
- RAINBOW ISLANDS ENHANCED, 1996, VARIOUS
- CLASSIC BUBBLE BOBBLE, 1999, GAME BOY COLOR



BEHIND THE SCENES

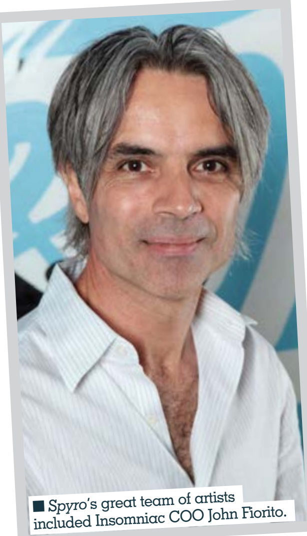
SPYRO THE DRAGON

When the world thought it couldn't handle another platformer with an anthropomorphic lead, Spyro the Dragon flew into our lives, breathing new fire into the genre



Released: 1998
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Key Staff: Ted Price (studio president), Mark Cerny (executive producer/designer) Brian Hastings, Alex Hastings, Peter Hastings, Matt Whiting (programmers), Craig Stitt, John Fiorito, Kirsten van Schreven (artists), Charles Zembillas (character designer), Stewart Copeland (composer)


Character design credit belongs to Charles Zembillas.


Spyro's great team of artists included Insomniac COO John Fiorito.

BACK IN THE MISTS OF THE LATE NINETIES, THE PLATFORMING GENRE SAW A CONTINUING RISE IN POPULARITY AS DEVELOPERS UTILISED THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FABLED 'THIRD DIMENSION'. By 1998, the console wars were well under way, with Sony's PlayStation and the Nintendo 64 as the front runners. Sony and Naughty Dog had already seen worldwide success with two *Crash Bandicoot* games, a flagship series that competed with the landmark 3D platformer *Super Mario 64* and cemented Crash as an unofficial mascot of Sony's grey wonder box. But hot on the heels of the moustachioed plumber and mischievous marsupial was a cocky purple dragon by the name of Spyro, created by relative newcomers Insomniac Games. *Spyro the Dragon* put a new spin on explorative platforming through large panoramic worlds in which players could glide great distances, fight enemies with fire breath and horn charges, or complete multiple goals simultaneously such as freeing dragons, recovering stolen dragon eggs, collecting keys and amassing gems.

Having seen some critical success with their first game *Disruptor* in 1996, the Insomniac team set a course for their next title with a democratic discussion. "There were several ideas floating around for a new project," says programmer Peter Hastings, who joined his two older brothers Alex and Brian at Insomniac Games as a young summer intern after leaving the nuclear weapons industry. "Environment artist Craig Stitt had this idea for a game about a dragon, and Ted Price [company president] was thinking it might be cool to make a game about aliens invading Earth. There seemed to be more enthusiasm for the dragon idea." Hastings reveals that Ted Price's suggestion was eventually realised as *Resistance: Fall of Man* on PS3.

Although the team was set on their idea, Spyro's eventual realisation as a character went through several stages "Spyro was originally named Pete," Hastings reveals, "but it didn't take long for our publisher's lawyers to tell us that Disney had a movie called *Pete's Dragon*, and there was no way that was going to fly. The name 'Pyro the Dragon' was briefly considered, but sounded a little too mature, so we settled on Spyro."


Each rescued dragon triggers a short voiced cutscene, complete with gameplay advice and droplets of lore.


Spyro's partner Sparx the Dragonfly acts like a living health bar. He feeds on butterflies released from vanquished foes.

> THEY TOLD ME ABOUT THEIR AMBITIOUS TECHNOLOGY IDEAS. AT FIRST I THOUGHT THEY WERE OUT OF THEIR MINDS **MATT WHITING**

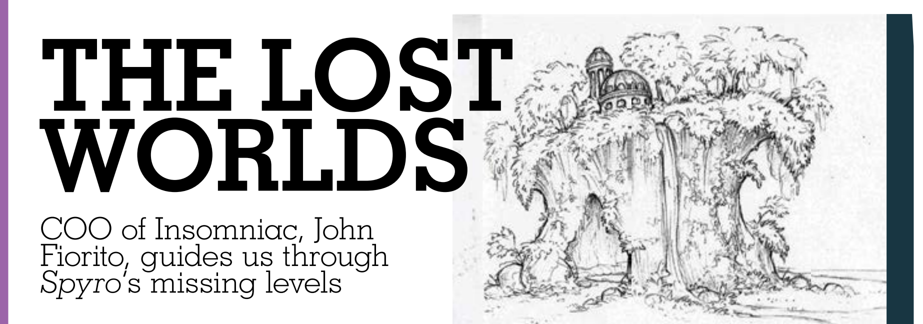
But alongside a loveable character, intriguing game worlds were needed. Often platformers' environments are interchangeable with the obligatory 'fire world', 'ice world', 'jungle world' set-up. But *Spyro* was different, introducing major themes such as Artisans, Peace Keepers, Magic Crafters and Machinists. The main instigator behind this was Kirsten van Schreven, an artist with a background in fine art and animation. "I was pretty much given full creative reign by Ted Price who was a most delightful, patient and charming boss," she reveals, before detailing the process of design undertaken by the team. "We'd all sit around a table and brainstorm each level, which involved lots of coffee and good-natured shouting. We'd come up with a feeling and theme for each level and were careful not to be corny about it," she explains. "I would do some pre-production sketches and come up with a stack of relevant textures for each level. I would always bring a sketchbook to the meetings and draw ideas while the crew discussed the level in question. Gameplay also evolved out of some of these designs and so the production design and gameplay meetings were all rolled into one."

Although the worlds had a fairy tale-esque quality running throughout, some of Kirsten's design influences came from cinema. "I'm a bit of a film nerd" she proudly states, revealing the cinematic classics that inspired particular stages. "The Beast Makers hub was inspired by Kurtz's compound in *Apocalypse Now*. Some levels were borderline *Indiana Jones* and there was also a bit of *Star Wars* (Cliff Town etc) thrown in there for good measure."

Spyro's worlds were designed to be panoramic, allowing for open player exploration. But in order to make this happen, a solid game engine and a lot of custom coding was required, as Peter Hastings explains. "The new technology back then just barely had the power to render in 3D, and everything had to be written with maximum efficiency in mind. I recall Alex [Hastings] saying (or bragging, perhaps?) that

THE LOST WORLDS

COO of Insomniac, John Fiorito, guides us through *Spyro*'s missing levels



WITH SIX HUB worlds in the game, there was plenty to explore in *Spyro*. But one world didn't make the cut, a hub world that would've been underwater. "We did not get very far on the underwater level," explains Fiorito. "Because of the verticality, we encountered many camera problems since Spyro's movement was mostly in the horizontal plane. Also, while swimming was part of Spyro's moveset, it was not a major part and we couldn't really justify an entire underwater section when we were making the game. The same challenge existed for enemies as we'd need to design, program, and animate an entire aquatic set of characters. I will say that the idea of swimming stuck with us and we did explore it further in our *Ratchet & Clank* games." This underwater hub was referenced by the name "Aquatics" by Matt Whiting, and Fiorito has supplied us with concepts he drew of the world, with indicators of starting points. Although it didn't make the cut, the sequel featured a lot of swimming and a world called Aquaria Towers, possibly a full realisation of the team's original idea.

But this was not the only shelved idea. "After three games there were a number of levels that we never realised." Fiorito continues. "The one I remember most was a spherical world where Spyro was on a skateboard. We ended up using the skateboard mechanic in *Spyro: Year of the Dragon* but the gravity, camera, and control scheme proved too much of a challenge on PS1." As for further artwork, both John Fiorio and Kirsten van Schreven have given us access to early design concepts for levels, most of which never made it into the final game.

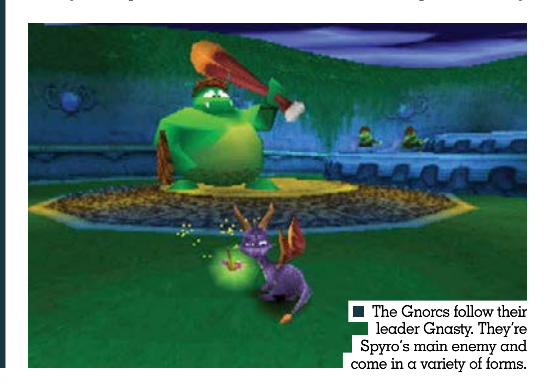


about 80% of the code being run in *Spyro* was hand-written assembly code. What didn't get written in assembly was written in C, which is slower than assembly but still orders of magnitude faster and harder to use than modern languages like C#." Hastings is quick to emphasise just how much coding has changed since then. "To a programmer starting to work in games today, the industry back then would be almost unrecognisable."

This in-depth approach to development allowed the team to introduce new takes on player exploration. "In *Spyro* we made the unorthodox decision to give the player a completely unlimited ability to glide." Hastings explains. "Spyro can jump in the air and glide without any artificial timer restricting how far he can go. You could glide all the way across the level if you found a high enough point to start from. On the face of it this made the levels harder to design since Spyro's movement is so much less bounded. But it also gave Spyro something he could do that no other platformer could." Hastings then tells us how this element created new experiences for both designer and player, and how this could create a fun experience in-game. "It became possible to design levels with high peaks, where the player was expected to look out across the entire level and spot distant secret areas to glide to. This led to another subtle but important design decision; the sparkle of a gem in *Spyro* can be seen at any distance. Even if the gem is so far away that it would be smaller than a single pixel on your television screen, the game still draws a lens flare sparkle over its position. This is because there are some gems that we really did intend you to fly halfway across the level to retrieve!"

But for large terrain traversal, *Spyro*'s control system needed to be accurate and fluid. Insomniac did a bang-up job, with *Spyro* boasting some of the smoothest controls among platformers at the time. And like other developmental decisions, the explanation behind this achievement is unorthodox. "We hired a rocket scientist from NASA," Hastings says. "No, really. Matt Whiting programmed a great deal of the control and camera code, and the smoothness of the controls is owed to his ability to squeeze a great deal of matrix algebra into the tiny slice of computational time that the PlayStation could give us."

As a newcomer entering part-way through development, Whiting recalls his initiation into the project and how revolutionary Insomniac's tech was at the time. "At first I met with Alex and Brian Hastings, and they told me about their ambitious technology ideas. At first I thought they were out of their minds (nobody was doing



The Gnorcs follow their leader Gnasty. They're Spyro's main enemy and come in a variety of forms.

■ Stewart Copeland of The Police composed Spyro's music.

■ Spyro's fire breath is able to take down small and large enemies alike.

WHAT THEY SAID...

This is really the first title to ever successfully pull off the whole videogame adaptation of a cartoon world, and we all know there's been plenty of tries

Gamespot, 1998

anything close to that kind of technology with the PlayStation), but then I got to see Spyro himself, and I was sold."

Whiting's background in space technology gave him a solid base for handling game development. "My original training back at NASA was in flight control systems, so naturally I translated that experience into videogame controls," he says casually, going on to detail the teething issues of the camera system and the tweaks needed. "We originally focused on making the camera serve gameplay the best it possibly could be. This meant aggressively trying to stay lined up with the direction Spyro was going and showing the player what lay ahead. Play-testing showed us that the fast-paced, dynamic motion of the camera as it tried to keep up with Spyro's acrobatics was causing some players to feel seasick, so we dialled it back in several key areas to find just the right balance of playability. One example in particular was the up-and-down motion of the camera following Spyro as he jumped. The tilt up and then back down feels very much like a boat riding on waves, and has the same effect: seasickness. By allowing Spyro to move up and down a little on screen, the camera was able to remain steady while still showing what lay ahead."

Due to the design elements of constant camera adjustments and higher freedoms of player movement within an open space, Insomniac faced a huge challenge when it came to rendering graphics in the world as players explored and uncovered it. Luckily, they had a fresh solution on the problem, as Hastings explains. "There were actually two separate worlds being rendered in a *Spyro* level. Each level had a detailed version built out of textured polygons, and a much more impressionistic, simple version built out of fast-rendering untextured polygons. For anything near the player, the detailed world was drawn, but for distant objects the simple version was used. This 'Level-Of-Detail' system is now used by pretty much every game on the planet, but at the time it was quite new."

> **I WOULD DO ROUGHLY THREE SONGS A DAY. THEN THE NEXT DAY I'D GO BACK AND TART THEM UP** STEWART COPELAND



■ Spyro was voiced by Carlos Alazraqui, then known for voicing Rocko and Spunky in the cartoon *Rocko's Modern Life*.

These thoughtful approaches towards technical problems also extended to Spyro's moveset for attacking enemies. The plucky purple protagonist had two ways to engage in-game nasties: breathing fire and charging enemies with his horns. Both were great fun, but they also served an underlying design purpose. "Spyro's moves were really something special in the way they coordinated his dragon nature and the game design," explains Whiting, detailing how these simple decisions came to be with the guidance of Mark Cerny – an industry veteran who has worked on numerous games and was lead architect for the PS4's hardware. "He has a really fantastic, almost mathematical approach to design. He identified the need for a second attack move along with specific enemy vulnerabilities to create the depth we needed for a combat-focused platformer. From that, the charge move was born." This introduction meant players had to switch tactics when facing different enemies, but without having to remember a huge moveset. For example, some enemies would be impervious to fire by using shields or armour, but that couldn't stop players from bashing them to bits with Spryo's horn charge.

And while *Spyro the Dragon*'s new approaches in graphical rendering, level traversal and attack options all added to the fun, an undeniably crucial element of the game's atmosphere came from the soundtrack created by Stewart Copeland: co-founder and drummer for world famous rock band The Police. "I would do roughly three songs a day," reveals mad-man Copeland, "then the next day I'd go back and tart them up a little bit." Although the deadline was tight, Copeland saw this restriction as a positive. "It was somewhat daunting to look at the amount of music that they needed, which was like a double album of backing tracks, but that has never worried me so much because I've learned that there are times when you have to produce a lot of music fleetingly, that by some strange anomaly comes out as being profound."

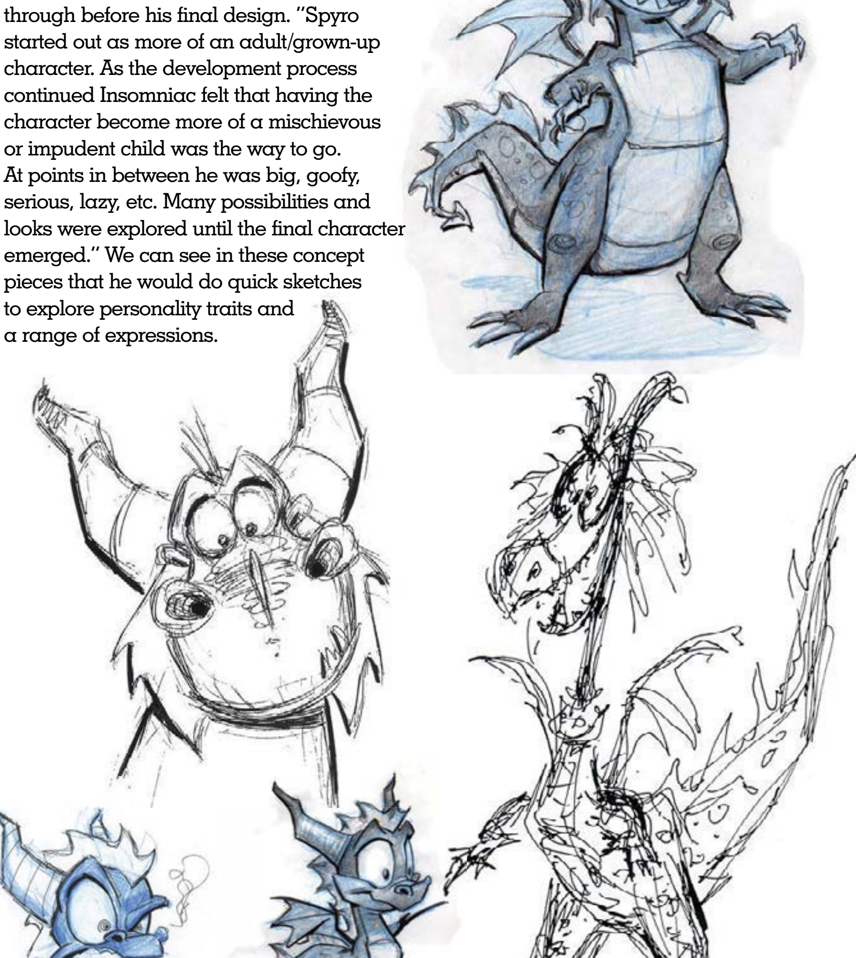


■ When you've rescued enough dragons, or collected enough gems, balloonists can take you to new worlds.

DESIGN A DRAGON

Hollywood Cartoonist Charles Zembillas lays out Spyro's design evolution

IN ORDER TO create a character that players would fall in love with, Insomniac called in Charles Zembillas, hot off the heels of designing Crash Bandicoot for Naughty Dog. He details the changes Spyro went through before his final design. "Spyro started out as more of an adult/grown-up character. As the development process continued Insomniac felt that having the character become more of a mischievous or impudent child was the way to go. At points in between he was big, goofy, serious, lazy, etc. Many possibilities and looks were explored until the final character emerged." We can see in these concept pieces that he would do quick sketches to explore personality traits and a range of expressions.



> A GAMING EVOLUTION

Spyro The Dragon > Ratchet & Clank > Rayman Origins



Insomniac helped make platformers more action-orientated. Naughty Dog pursued a similar direction with *Ratchet & Clank*.



Rayman Origins helped re-establish quality 2D platforming with its silky controls, gorgeous visuals, and co-op play.





■ The first boss level, Toasty, contains one of the game's best compositions, complete with slow build-ups and drumming excellence.

I COULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR A BETTER INTRODUCTION TO THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY THAN WORKING ON SPYRO
PETER HASTINGS

In order to create a great soundtrack Copeland was given access to early builds of *Spyro*. "They gave me very early versions of the levels to play with and I had a lot of fun playing with it. And immediately, writing music for it was welling up. It just seemed like a real natural fit." Of course, playing through the game added an extra layer of challenge to his role as composer. "Some of the levels I couldn't beat and they would have to send me cheats. Of course they got to make me invincible. I could turn on that cheat. But then I'd still have to jump over the course and get to that f**king landing zone there. No matter how invincible you are, you still gotta make the jump!"

And although dynamic soundtracks were still a pipe dream for game developers and composers, Copeland notes the odd phenomenon of pre-recorded music synching with unscripted action. "The weird thing about the soundtrack is that the music just tinkles along according to its own agenda but somehow seems to match the gameplay by some miracle. You know, just at that point the riff changes into the minor key and you think 'oh s**t!' It becomes a plot point: 'I was happy, now I'm sad.'" It's for reasons like this that Copeland reflects positively on his hard work. "They're some of the best tunes I ever wrote. I am extremely proud of that and my heart is full of love for those that got the same buzz from it that I did."

Even though the work was strenuous for everyone involved, there was a sense of camaraderie, especially in the small Insomniac office. "The atmosphere was very much like a start-up." Hastings nostalgically recalls. "Everyone was extremely close since we were working crazy hours on the project, eating lunches and often dinners together at the office. We also played an insane amount of *Mario Kart 64* and *StarCraft*." Van Schreven also remembers the humble nature of the industry back then, and its technology. "It was exciting as it was the very early days of videogames and the crew was very small. I still remember Sony bringing in the very first PlayStation, which could only be used for half an hour at a time or it would overheat and spontaneously combust!"

But it wasn't just other members of Insomniac that shared in the good times. The team also had a close relationship with Naughty Dog, the developers of the hugely successful PlayStation platformer *Crash Bandicoot*. "In the very early days of the studio, we worked in the same building right across the hall from each other. We shared some of our technology on later games as well, and people from each office would play builds of the other's games when they got close to shipping." This relationship can be discovered in-game, as it contains an unlockable demo of *Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped*, and vice versa. "I don't know how the decision to include the demos got started, but I wouldn't be surprised if it just came up over lunch one day."

■ Kirsten van Schreven was a key artist on the team.

WHAT THEY SAID…



IGN

SPYRO THE DRAGON

Share. This dragon may be small, but he sure is big on action.

REVIEWS

Spyro may look like a cute little thing, but this purple, four-footed, winged creature packs a mean punch. I haven't had so much fun with a 3D platformer on the PlayStation since *Crash Bandicoot*

IGN, 1997

On release, *Spyro the Dragon* overall scored well with critics and was a huge commercial success, selling over five million copies, forever cementing its place in videogame history as one of the great 3D platformers while spawning a franchise in the process. As a young university student, the feedback on release was of great importance to Hastings. "I think I read every magazine that published a review of *Spyro*. Every website, too!" He recants, "I cared enough about the project that negative, or even just mixed reviews rankled. Over time I've learned that it's important to keep some distance between the games that I make and my own sense of self-worth. But back then I was letting the reception of my work define my existence." But regardless of reviews, Hastings still has fond memories of his entry into the business. "I couldn't have asked for a better introduction to the videogames industry than working on *Spyro*, or a better team to work with."

Since the Insomniac trilogy on PlayStation – Spyro has seen a range of games of hugely varying quality, with Spyro himself eventually being relegated to being part of the Skylanders franchise. Of course, many have speculated over a return to Spyro with Insomniac at the helm. And with the team having given *Ratchet & Clank* the treatment this year, many still have their hopes up. When broaching this topic, Hastings's answer is simple. "I'd definitely buy it!" Copeland backs up Hastings' response whilst referring to his current Classical work with a little glib humour. "If I got a call for some new version of *Spyro*, I would love that. I would totally jump all over that, right in-between writing my great majestic symphonic works! Aw, what a great other side of the coin a *Spyro* game would be."

In the age of reboots, perhaps there could be a chance for Spyro to proudly soar again in an open-world platformer with the quality that fans remember him fondly for. But for old gamers and newcomers alike, Spyro still holds the lasting legacy of a great platforming trilogy.

JULIAN ON GRADUATING FROM TABLETOP GAMES TO VIDEOGAMES

"I did design a lot of board games. Many of them were half-finished and I was thinking about a career in them, for sure, but then of course along came home computers and that's when I thought: 'aha, these are maybe a means to translate some of my board game ideas onto computer.'"





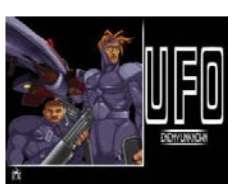
INTERVIEW JULIAN GOLLOP

In 1994, Julian Gollop created the sci-fi-inspired turn-based strategy game UFO: Enemy Unknown – otherwise known as X-COM: UFO Defense. Over two decades later it's still hailed as one of the most influential videogames of all time

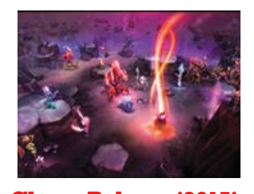
SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



Laser Squad (1988)
Creator and designer



UFO: Enemy Unknown (X-COM: UFO Defense in North America) (1994)
Creator, developer and designer



Chaos Reborn (2015)
Creator, developer and designer



What were you doing prior to developing games?

The first games I got into were actually board games – *Squad Leaders* is one that stands out, for example. When computer games came out, I was obviously familiar with arcade games and played *Space Invaders*, *Robotron*, *Asteroids*, *Defender*, those kind of games. I was still very much into the board game strategy-type affairs, which of course didn't exist on computers at that time. My first computer was a ZX81, though, which I bought secondhand, in 1982, and then I got my Sinclair Spectrum in the summer after I left school. That'd be 1983, and I started working straight away on my first game which was called *Nebula*.

What was your understanding of coding back then?

It was very much learning on the job. I learned BASIC language on the Spectrum which wasn't too difficult. *Nebula* was one of the very first 4X games, incidentally, and is a space empires game where you start on one planet, you have to explore the galaxy, you have to conquer the world and you have to fight against other empires. It was turn-based and it was really quite cool. I actually made it during the course of that summer and it was published before the end of the year by Redshift. I had to learn very quickly.

IT WAS VERY MUCH LEARNING ON THE JOB. I LEARNED BASIC LANGUAGE ON THE SPECTRUM WHICH WASN'T TOO DIFFICULT

Was setting out as a company always something you wanted to do?

No, it wasn't something I always wanted to do. In fact, it wasn't until I was about two years into my university degree that I kind of decided that [the degree] wasn't really something I wanted to do either – economics and sociology. There was a friend of mine in Harlow that wanted to set up a company and asked me to partner up with him, which we did as Target games, the first company we had. He left within the year and my brother then came in and we set up another company, which was Mythos Games, and it lasted from 1989 - 2000. I was getting into the entrepreneur mode then and I've since set up several more companies. I think I realised that doing this was a good way to develop the ideas that I wanted to see in games.

How did *X-Com* come to be?

It came about with a collaboration with Microprose UK. We had this demo, *Laser Squad 2*, which was basically an evolution of what we'd done before. It was still a squad-based tactical combat game, but it didn't have any more of a strategic layer, apart from having a sequence of missions loosely based

on a story. What Microprose wanted was something that could compete with Sid Meier's *Civilization* – they wanted this grand scale videogame that had to have some elements in it.

There had to be a research function which included some kind of civilopedia; they wanted it set on earth, in the future; and they actually suggested the theme of UFOs, largely based on Gerry Anderson's UFO television series. These elements were all combined somehow to form the basis of X-Com. Obviously I had to then go away and figure out how such a game would actually work. My initial design was met with some confusion and puzzlement on the part of Microprose and it took a bit of explaining to show how I'd actually make it. The problem was that there really wasn't any other game around that was remotely like it in the way it was structured in the way the strategical and the tactical combined.

THEY TOLD MICROPROSE UK: 'CANCEL THIS GAME, CANCEL THAT GAME, CANCEL THIS ONE' – ONE OF THEM WAS X-COM

And *X-Com* was almost cancelled?

Yeah, and we didn't know about it at the time, which was probably cool because that would've discouraged us a bit. It was in fact officially cancelled by Spectrum Holobyte and they told Microprose UK: "cancel this game, cancel that game, cancel this one" – one of them was *X-Com*. For some reason, though, Microprose UK decided to continue with the game – it had a lot of strong internal support at Microprose UK, basically, which kept it alive. Spectrum Holobyte then really needed some kind of release for their end of year quarter in 1994 and Microprose UK said: "well, you know that game you told us to cancel? Well we've still got it if you want it?" Because Spectrum Holobyte were desperate they of course said yes and *X-Com* survived an actual cancellation.

You mentioned there was nothing like *X-Com* before *X-Com* – how exciting or even daunting was working on something like that at the time?

I was pretty clear on how the game was going to work from the beginning. A lot of the elements were in place as described and the final version of the game pretty much matched that original vision pretty accurately. That was cool, but the actual development was pretty daunting – it was just myself and my brother Nick who were doing the programming, and I was doing the design as well, so it was a really small team. Even in those days it would've been considered a relatively small team for such a big project.

In one way the advantage was it allowed us to focus on what we were doing against that original vision without any interference. Basically, once we'd overcome that hurdle with Microprose and once we'd decided what the elements were, we were able to do what we wanted. The problem was that we really didn't have sufficient resources to do it in time and it did take us a long time to do it. The project was nearly three years in the making and one of the big problems that we had was because it's a complex game with many subsystems that interact, it was until near the end of development that it was really starting to come together as a whole; that we were really able to play it as whole.

This was a little bit of a problem, because we had a little bit of a crunch mode towards the last few months.

How does it feel to see modern games still pulling from features that *X-Com*, some two decades later?

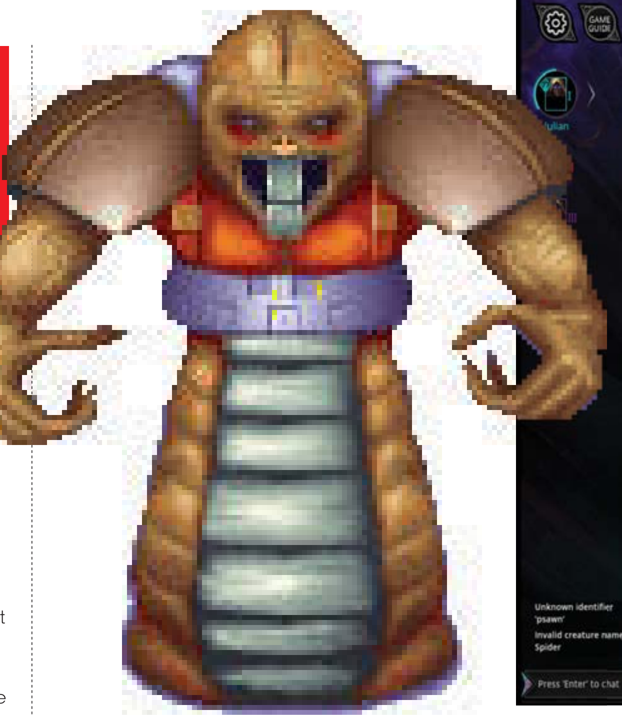
It's excellent, I guess it shows that we were pioneering in those days in a way. It's really nice to have something that you've done, that's been remembered and still has some influence, it's really cool, and obviously still influences what I do today as well.

Before Firaxis stepped in, the series seemed to lose its way following the original *X-Com*. Would you agree?

Yes it did. After *X-Com Apocalypse*, there was *Interceptor*, and then there was another

■ One of publisher Microprose's requests was that *X-Com* included a civilopedia - a research development mechanism hub, as pictured above.







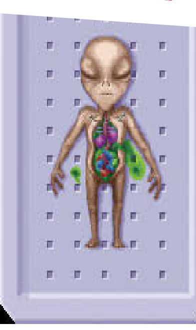


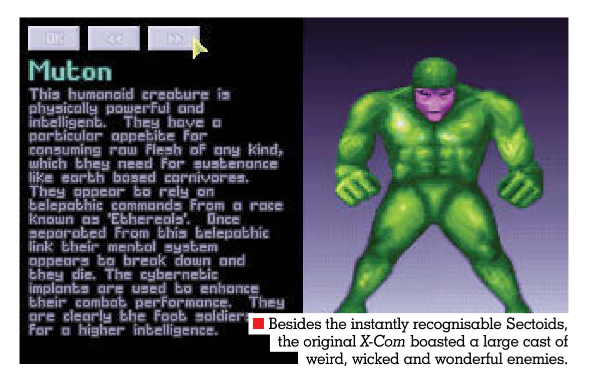


After a successful crowdfunding campaign in 2014, Gollop's turn-based tactical role-playing game *Chaos Reborn* was released and is still being updated today.

JULIAN ON WHERE THE IDEA FOR LAST YEAR'S CHAOS REBORN ORIGINATED

"One of the board games that I made in 1981 is a little wizard game based on cards and it became a computer game called Chaos. Much more recently, of course, this became Chaos Reborn, which we published last year - based on that original board game that I made back in 1981."





Besides the instantly recognisable Sectoids, the original *X-Com* boasted a large cast of weird, wicked and wonderful enemies.



huge project called *X-Com Alliance* which was a hybrid FPS, squad-based tactical thingy – I'm not sure exactly how it was going to work. I do, however, remember being at E3 in 1999 where they had a huge display for *X-Com Alliance* with lots of dwarfs running around dressed as Sectoids, and huge tubes filled with water, and alien fetuses in them, it was all very weird. The game was ultimately cancelled at which point *X-Com* as a franchise went into limbo, until Firaxis resurrected it.

How do you feel about the Firaxis games?
It's great. In a way it's going back to some of the elements from the original game and I thought it was very, very good. I think the first one, *Enemy Unknown*, did suffer a little bit in that the strategic level was very simplified and it became more about min/maxing certain numbers. Obviously they did something different with *XCOM 2*, they tried to expand that area, which is good. But overall they're fantastic games for sure.

Is there anything in particular you learned while making *X-Com* that you've carried into the development of *Chaos Reborn*?
[Laughs] To try and get games done a little bit quicker. To try and stay true to your original vision if you can. Especially when you're working with a publisher – there are a lot of things that can sidetrack you. Be clear about who you're aiming a game at.

***Chaos Reborn* was crowdfunded. Between that and being the guy who created *X-Com*, did you feel a lot of pressure to deliver?**
Absolutely. What we did with *Chaos Reborn* is take the original game as the foundation and add some more elements on the outside of it. Not all of them have been entirely successful. One of the things that's interesting about Chaos Reborn is that the original game is based on RNG outcomes, including casting spells and the casting system. This is quite brutal in the sense that you've got binary outcomes for these, which is something that made the original game distinct.

With *Chaos Reborn*, we noticed there was a distinct group of players who absolutely loathe RNG – not that they mildly dislike it, it's like they have some pathological hatred towards it. As an experiment, we produced what we call the "Law Mode" where spellcasting is deterministic, based on mana and hit points, to see how that'd work. We wondered if this would mitigate the strongly negative comments about our RNG and that seems to have been the case which led me to some conclusions about how RNG should and shouldn't be used in games.

***Chaos Reborn* is still releasing regular updates, but what does the future hold for it?**
We're still planning to keep updating it as long as people are playing it and there's a great player community there. So long as they're playing and want to keep playing we'll keep working on it. We're also already working on our new project – Phoenix Point and that is a much bigger project and much more *X-Com* like in its design.

Do you think there's a part of you that will intrinsically always want to make *X-Com*-like games?
Probably, yes!

Following Criterion's stint on the Need For Speed franchise the team splintered off to new pastures. Many of the original developers, including director Alex Ward, can now be found at *Dangerous Golf* developer Three Fields Entertainment.

GAME CHANGERS

BURNOUT

Released: 1 November 2001 **Publisher:** Acclaim Entertainment **Developer:** Criterion Games **System:** PS2, GameCube, Xbox

It's hard to believe, but Burnout is already 15 years old. The game largely responsible for refining and redefining arcade racing in the modern era, join us as we return to this Criterion classic

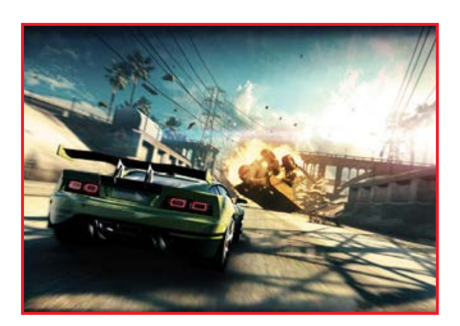
WHAT IS IT about jumping behind the wheel of an impressive concoction of metal and mechanical engineering that we find so damned appealing? All it takes is the roar of an engine and the squeal of burning rubber to edge a dangerous smile from ear to ear. Ease your finger onto the trigger, feel yourself get thrown into the back of your chair and before long you'll become mesmerised by the world whipping past you at 100mph; racing games have been a cornerstone of the videogame industry since the Seventies. They offer cerebral escapism, the opportunity to test drive some of the most powerful man-made creations ever to grace the road and the racing track. But it wasn't until *Burnout* came along, back in the winter of 2001, where we were given the opportunity – nay, actively encouraged – to meld an inherent need for speed with destructive and dangerous tendencies.

Looking back at *Burnout* now, it's still easy to see the appeal – and that's in spite of the washed out polygons and questionable framerate. But this classic inspired a decade of sequels because what it established here was so undeniably strong. Developer Criterion grabbed the racing genre – typically defined by serious simulations and simple arcade experiences – and forcibly administered a shot of adrenaline right into its beating heart.

There's something impressively chaotic about *Burnout* - its sense of speed is indisputably impressive to this day. Rewind back to 2001; such a sense of movement was liberating, if not entirely terrifying. Criterion didn't just make its cars fast, it made it feel as if your grip on the road and reality around you was slipping away. The roads were packed with pedestrians, travelling roadblocks that made your slick city driving as dangerous as it was exhilarating.

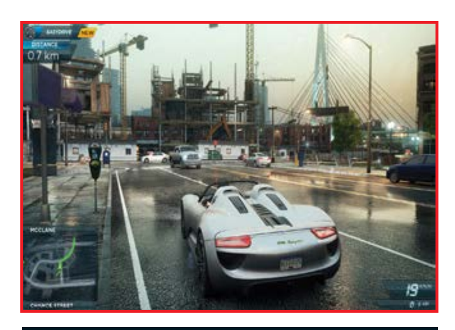
WHAT CAME NEXT?

THREE GREAT GAMES BURNOUT PAVED THE WAY FOR



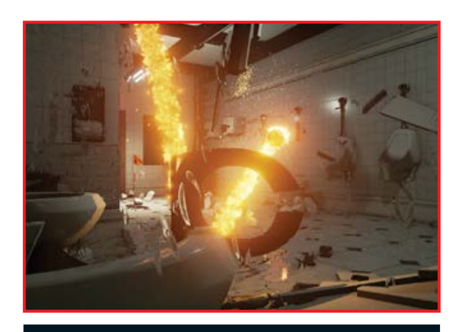
SPLIT/SECOND

★ *Split/Second* took *Burnout*'s celebration of destruction and ramped it up. A racing game that takes place within a reality TV show, it kept the adrenaline pumping by giving you a host of environmental cues to trigger, causing the environment to warp around the action.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

★ *Need For Speed* was never the same after Criterion got its hands on it. The studio walked away from *Burnout*, opting to revive the *Most Wanted* series. It brought the speed and swagger of *Burnout* and merged it with the intensity of *Need For Speed*.



DANGEROUS GOLF

★ Wondering where Alex Ward and some of the other veteran Criterion developers are hiding? They are at Three Fields Entertainment, working on *Dangerous Golf*. A chaotic mini-golf game where, you've guessed it, destruction is key to success.

Never were you focused wholly on one objective. As time ticked away, edging you quicker to the checkpoint; even as rival racers weaved through traffic in front of you, stealing away precious seconds as you languished behind; you still found yourself careering away from the driving lines, heading straight into incoming headlights.

That's because near missing a passing vehicle, barrelling down the wrong side of the street of haphazardly drifting through intersections all worked to build up your heart rate meter. Eventually, a hot shot of nitrous would propel you faster still; suddenly you are equal parts mesmerised and terrified, the threat of death and the thrill of surviving were the two opposing forces that established *Burnout*'s magic grip on its players. The element of risk-and-reward was understated, but entirely unavoidable – it's a part of *Burnout*'s charm, something it would eventually lose as it transitioned to open-world environments.

THE THREAT OF DEATH AND THE THRILL OF SURVIVING WERE THE TWO OPPOSING FORCES THAT ESTABLISHED BURNOUT'S MAGIC GRIP OVER ITS PLAYERS



KEY FACTS

- The original working title for *Burnout* was 'Shiny Red Car' a name used internally at Criterion as it hunted for a publisher. It's likely a reference to one of the first cars the team ever built, a shiny red Venom SX – which would later become the Sports Coupe.

- Ever wondered why *Burnout* never looked good on American NTSC television sets? It's because Criterion never had one to hand and didn't realise how image quality or anti-aliasing would be affected by the change in refresh rate.

But what established it as legend was what happened when speed got the better of you. Hitting another vehicle didn't just slow you down in *Burnout*, it brought everything to spectacular halt. Connect with a solid object at speed and catastrophic destruction would unfold in wondrous fashion. Huge pile-ups would form and chunks of twisted metal would litter the roadside – the destructive realism was unrivalled in the day. After years of watching cars bounce off of one another like bumper cars at a funfair, suddenly rear-ending the rival in front of you became a viable and spectacular strategy.

That became *Burnout*'s trademark. You are forever balancing a desire to win a race and a need to see huge scenes of chaos on the road. Racing games would never be the same again. While *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact* would bring sweeping improvements to just about everything a year later – ushering in bigger and brasher gameplay along with a suite of classic game modes – you can still return to the original release and see *Burnout*'s core hook working to perfection. Players were thrilled, of course, with the high-octane action, the ridiculous destruction and thrilling racing, and that's something that we would see filter out into every action racer in the immediate years that followed.

The higher the risk, the higher the reward; that's no doubt how director Alex Ward first pitched *Burnout*, a game that was a terrifying concept to the old guard of publishers, used to pumping out pretty but sedated on-road experiences. But *Burnout*'s achievements and legacy can be seen running through racing games still to this day. Arcade racers may not put huge stock in destruction like they used to, but maintaining a visceral sense of speed while under constant duress is now a genre staple. *Burnout* is a classic that never went out of style; it'll leave you a twitching mess of nerves and adrenaline, but rarely will you find a game so utterly commanding of your full attention.



GAME CHANGERS

8 CONSEQUENCES OF GOING FULL THROTTLE

THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEARNING TO DRIVE VIA BURNOUT



TRAFFIC LIGHT OFFENCES

■ You don't win races by observing the rules of the road and that means you're often committing every driving offense in the book during your time with *Burnout*. But when that timer is ticking away, when a checkpoint is in sight, the last thing you have time for is stopping for a red light. In *Burnout*, Green means Go; Yellow means Keep Going and Red means Go Even Faster.

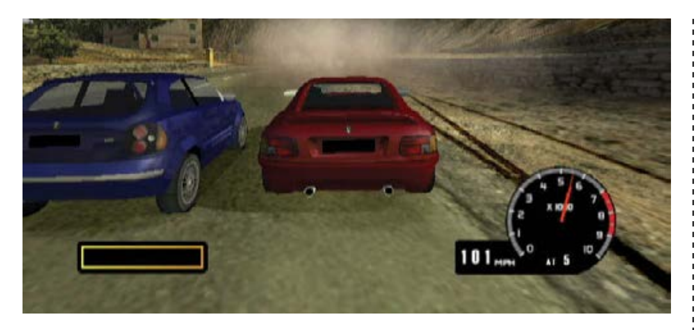
Prison: N/A Fine: £1,000 Penalty Points: 3



VIOLATING SPEED RESTRICTIONS

■ *Burnout* is all about driving fast, *real* fast. In fact, if you don't drive fast you'll probably fail out of a race before you've had a chance to complete a single lap. With a 70mph restriction attached to most motorways, that just isn't going to cut it. *Burnout* teaches you that speeding is the key to success, but taking the advice into the real world can leave you in hot water with the traffic cops.

Prison: N/A Fine: £1,000-£2,500 Penalty Points: 3-6



DRIVING WITHOUT INSURANCE

Do you remember that part at the start of *Burnout* where you have to go and get a loan and then slump it down to trader to buy insurance for your fancy new super car? No, well then, that's probably because *Burnout* doesn't care whether you have insurance or not. That's bad practice: it doesn't matter whether you are out for a Sunday drive or re-creating Tokyo Drift in your local car park, always get insurance.

Prison: N/A **Fine:** £5,000 **Penalty Points:** 3-6



VIOLATING LICENCE RULES

Just because you've got yourself a license to drive a vehicle doesn't give you license to run wild on the roads. Yes, it'll let you drive to the beach and get down to the shops it will *not* give you permission to engage in illegal street races. This is actually a crime in itself, 'driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence'. If you can afford the super car you can probably afford the fine, but the points *always* hurt.

Prison: N/A **Fine:** £1,000 **Penalty Points:** 3-6



FAILING TO STOP AFTER AN ACCIDENT

Do you know what's awesome in *Burnout*? Crashing. You smash into a vehicle at speed and you're treated to a glory shot replaying the accident in slow motion from a cinematic angle, teaching you once and for all that crashing your vehicle always looks cool. But you never stop to report it, you speed straight off in pursuit of the next checkpoint; that's no way to act on the real streets.

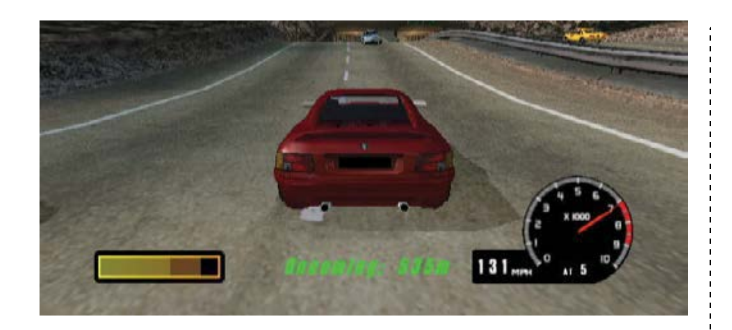
Prison: 6 months **Fine:** £5,000 **Penalty Points:** 5-10



CARELESS OR INCONSIDERATE DRIVING

While you're often driving with deft precision in *Burnout*, it rarely observes the rules of road. Between all the drifting, mounting the pavement and speeding it could be reasonably suggested that everything you do in *Burnout* could be considered both careless and inconsiderate. If you're looking to set a high-score, this is necessary; if you're looking to avoid a hefty fine and a few points, it is *not* advised.

Prison: N/A **Fine:** £5,000 **Penalty Points:** 3-9



ENGAGING IN DANGEROUS DRIVING

Burnout is all about danger. It's about feeding your need for speed and proving that you are the road king, building up your boost bar by driving on the wrong side of the road, storming through intersections, purposefully near-missing other vehicles and generally being a nuisance. Just an FYI, this is not looked upon kindly by UK driving laws and will land you in a ton of trouble – hope you like prison!

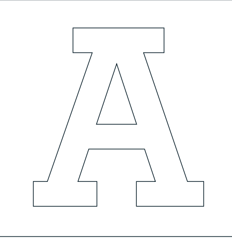
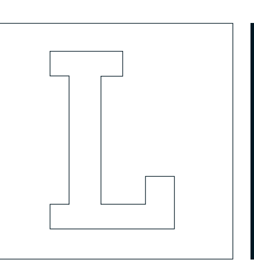
Prison: 2 years **Fine:** £Unlimited **Penalty Points:** 3-11



CAUSING DEATH BY DANGEROUS DRIVING

Look, if you T-bone a hatchback at 200mph, smiling gleefully as you study the crash cam, watching as the other vehicle careers off into the distance – there are going to be consequences. Deadly consequences; you've most likely murdered the driver. Now, not only have you dropped positions in the race, but you're also looking at 12 years in jail. As it turns out, *Burnout* is not a very good teaching tool for young drivers.

Prison: 12 years **Fine:** £Unlimited **Penalty Points:** 3-11

THE 

VAULT

SIBERIA 840 WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET

MANUFACTURER: **STEELSERIES** PRICE: **€349.99**

THE STEELSERIES SIBERIA 800 headset was already one of the best around with its Dolby 7.1 surround sound, OLED transmitter for minute control of EQ settings and voice chat levels, and of course its retractable microphone. For all intents and purposes, the Siberia 840 is the direct replacement for the 800 with all of its key qualities and features, plus one added extra; wireless Bluetooth connectivity.

The original headset was wireless of course and had the smart idea to have a backup battery charging in the transmitter unit so you know you always have a new 20-hour charge waiting for you when you need it, but Bluetooth makes things so much easier and more compatible. It means that the Siberia 840 headset is easily linkable with not only your PC and home consoles, but also your mobile phone or tablet, allowing you to move between devices while still retaining all the functionality of the headset (such as voice chat).

And then there's the build and audio quality, in which the 840 continues to excel. The audio is as good as ever really, with that surround sound offering great immersion into your chosen game while also making sure you get crisp, clear music playback too. The build quality has actually been marginally improved on this remodel, though, with some nice new caps on the ear cups and what feels like slightly firmer headband cushioning. It's not cheap, but it's very, very good.
www.steelseries.com

VERDICT 9/10

The headband is adjustable and thanks to memory foam along the inside, it's very comfortable too.

A retractable mic, instantly compatable with your system, makes for a neat and cool addition to this series of headsets.

GAMING CLOTHING



GLADOS

The t-shirt selection at GamerPrint is pretty good, offering a range of relatively subtle game-related shirts. This minimalist GLaDOS tee, for instance, keeps things fairly simple with its Aperture Science logo and text.
www.gamerprint.co.uk



MARIO BROTHERS PLUMBING SERVICES

Some more great font work from GamerPrint here as it gives a nod to the profession of everyone's favourite Italian, princess-saving duo. We particularly like the phone number choice for the company.
www.gamerprint.co.uk

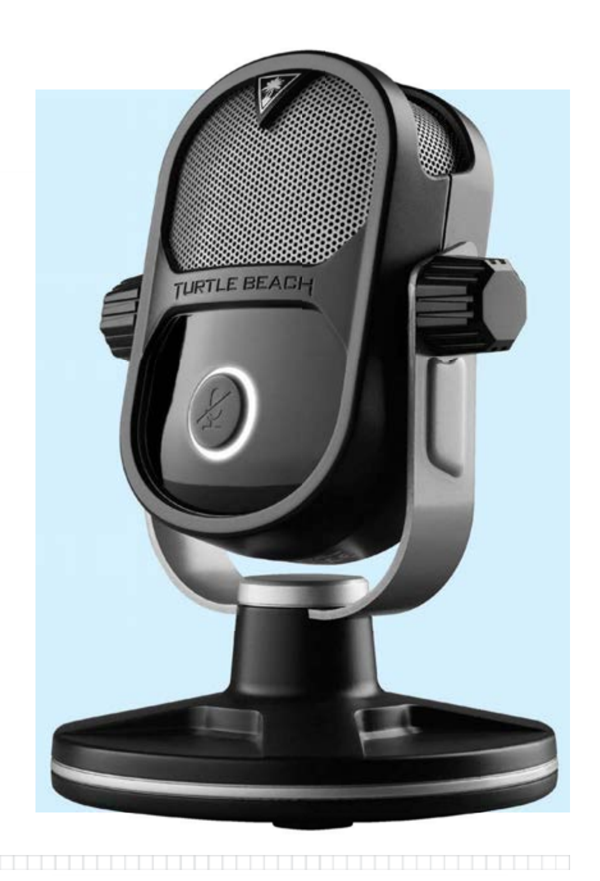


LON LON MILK

The folks over at Lon Lon Ranch didn't appear to have a great grasp of marketing, but if they did then this shirt advertising their wares to weary travellers would have been a good idea. Restore your health for only ten rupees.
www.gamerprint.co.uk

TURTLE BEACH STREAM MIC

SOLD BY: **TURTLE BEACH** PRICE: **£79.99**



WE DON'T KNOW about you, but if there's one thing likely to turn us off from an otherwise interesting livestream it's going to be poor audio quality from the streamer's mic. There are a bunch of mic setups available, but few that were actually built for the purpose of streaming and keeping things as simple as possible for the gamer. And that's where Turtle Beach's new Stream Mic steps in rather gracefully and offers exactly that kind of experience.

The Stream Mic is purpose built for console streaming, bypassing the need for a PC or Mac setup to capture your audio as you play. It works with Xbox One and PS4 and just needs to be plugged in via USB to start working. With advanced voice pickup and digital processing for EQ levels, you should find you get an instant improvement to the quality of your audio recording too.

Mounting options, personalisation of levels and headphone output round off a smartly designed mic that's also pretty reasonably priced compared to PC mics we've seen used up to now. Something to consider if you want to get into the streaming game as a hobbyist or pro.
TurtleBeach.com



Illuminated keys mean that this keyboard is perfect for low-light gaming on your PC, although you can't customise the colour.

The mechanical key setup is very good, with satisfying weight to every stroke and fast reaction to your inputs.

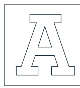
APEX M500 KEYBOARD

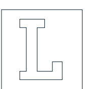
SOLD BY: **STEELSERIES** PRICE: **€119.99**

STEELSERIES IS pitching this mechanical keyboard at the affordable pro gaming level and it hits that market dead on. The build quality of the Apex M500 is excellent with a durable plastic backed up by a steel backplate, which gives it a little weight and additional support. The keys have a nice resistance to them with very little click and the use of Cherry MX Red switches means you're getting the kind of instant response from your inputs that any eSports professional would demand.

Perhaps the thing we actually like the most about this keyboard is that it isn't over the top. The quality is sound as we've described, it does its job of being a competition-ready gaming keyboard very well, but aside from some blue illumination, it's not flashy. You could just as happily use this as your everyday keyboard if you wanted to without too much concern.
If you're looking for a keyboard that's going to give you the response times you need for online play and don't want to spend a fortune on it then this looks like as good an option as we've seen in a while.
www.steelseries.com

VERDICT 8/10




MINECRAFT EXPLODED BUILDS: MEDIEVAL FORTRESS

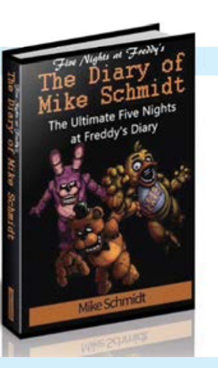
PUBLISHER: **EGMONT**

THE OFFICIAL MINECRAFT guides from Mojang and Egmont have been pretty good so far, but you might think that the basics have pretty much been covered with all the other titles. Even advanced tips for crafting, building and surviving have pretty much been handled. So, it's interesting to see the team approach the game in a slightly different way with a themed construction guide whose chief selling point is the blown-out view it can offer of individual projects.

The idea here is to help you build an entire fortress layout, including a village and a main fortified keep. The book is nicely paced in terms of the complexity of the items being built too, with plenty of room (and suggestions for) variations to show some of your own creative flair. From the basics of building a sturdy turret on the outskirts of your encampment to the more complex task of designing a working portcullis, everything is easy to follow with some excellent imagery and smart use of instructional symbols.

Following through this book really reminded us of following through an old LEGO building guide on a new set of blocks. While all the instructions are there to build things exactly as you're supposed to, there's room for changing things up and trying ideas out as you go. Having spent a little time away from *Minecraft*, it was great to be able to head back in with some really defined concepts that we could break down and for that alone this book does an amazing job.

www.egmont.co.uk



FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S: THE DIARY OF MIKE SCHMIDT

Inspired by the series of indie horror games, this is the beginning of new series of books following the protagonist of the Five Nights At Freddy's series as he starts his job as the pizzeria's night watchman. We're curious to see if the jump scares translate.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



TERRARIA: THE ULTIMATE SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

Terraria and *Minecraft* have always been similar and now they also share a growing market of guides. This book looks to direct you through some of the tougher challenges of the opening of the game. *Terraria* is not always as forgiving as *Minecraft*.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



SOULCALIBUR: NEW LEGENDS OF PROJECT SOUL

Collecting much of the artwork from *SoulCalibur V*, this new book is packed with concepts and background info on the massive cast of characters from the last game. There are rough designs, storyboards and more to enjoy.

www.forbiddenplanet.com





Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.gamestm.co.uk
www.greatdigitalmags.com

Magazine team

Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
☎ 01202 586213
Art Editor **Andy Salter**
Features Editor **Josh West**
Editor In Chief **Dan Hutchinson**
Senior Art Editor **Stephen Williams**
Photographer **James Sheppard**
Publishing Director **Aaron Asadi**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors

Luke Albigés, Adam Barnes, Vikki Blake, James Churchill, Sanne de Boer, Joe Donnelly, Ross Hamilton, Tim Henderson, Steve Holmes, Fiona Hudson, Darran Jones, Carries Mok, John Robertson, Drew Sleep, Ed Smith, Hannah Westlake

Cover Image

PlayStation 4 Pro © 2016 Sony Interactive Entertainment, LLC. Xbox One S © 2016 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Advertising

Digital or printed media packs are available on request.
Head of Sales Hang Deretz ☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Account Manager Anthony Godsell ☎ 01202 586420
anthony.godsell@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International

games™ is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401 licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions

For subscription enquiries email:
gamestm@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ UK 0844 848 8429
☎ Overseas +44 1795 592 864
www.imaginesubs.co.uk
Head Of Subscriptions Sharon Todd

Circulation

Circulation Director Darren Pearce

Production

Production Director Jane Hawkins

Finance

Finance Director Marco Peroni

Founder

Group Managing Director Damian Butt

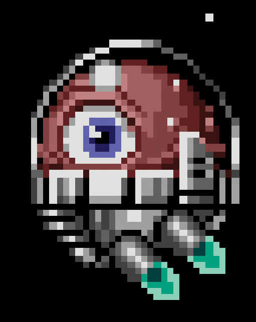
Printing & Distribution

Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Ind. Estate, Poole, Dorset, BH16 5SN
☎ 01202 628 300
Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU.
☎ 0203 787 9060
www.marketforce.co.uk
Distributed in Australia by Gordon & Gotch Australia Pty Ltd, 26 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086 Australia
☎ +61 2 9972 8800

ISSN 1478-5889

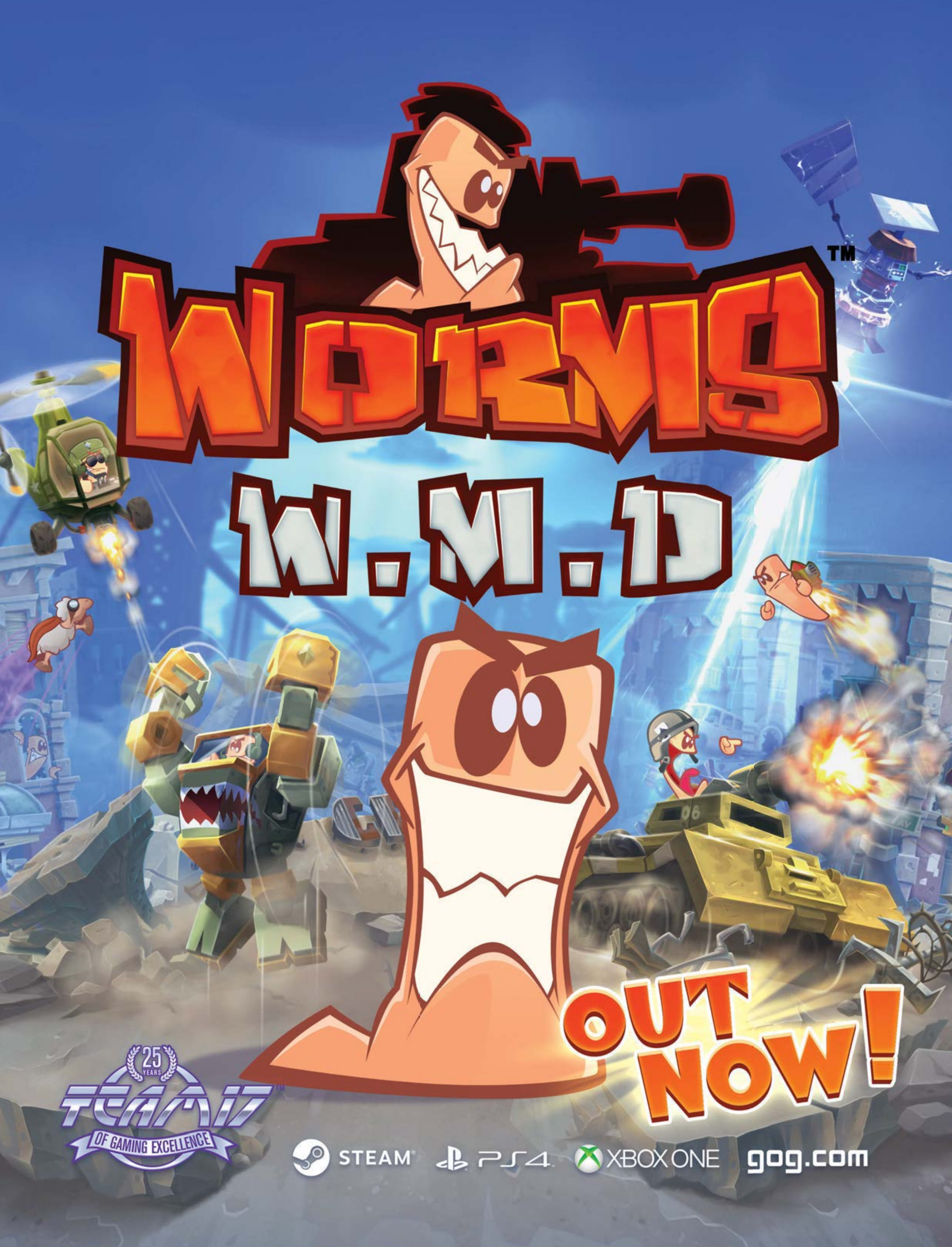






TO BE CONTINUED

IN GAMES™ 180, ON SALE 3 NOVEMBER



WORMS™
W.M.D
OUT NOW!
25 YEARS
TEAM17
OF GAMING EXCELLENCE
STEAM
PS4
XBOX ONE
gog.com